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BEAM US UP!
Star Trek Beyond
has its HD lasers
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PLUS:
THE 4K BLU-RAYS
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A class act
ATC 5.1 offers
real sonic thrills

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- THE SHALLOWS
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- THE BFG ■ IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE 3D

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→ ONKYO SOUNDBAR → RESTORING CULT CLASSICS IN 4K → OPINION → LOEWE

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: December 22, 2016



Cinema room assemble! p36

Welcome

As a reader highlights elsewhere in this issue, now's the perfect time of the year to watch movies. The clocks have gone back, it's cold outside and it's dark seemingly all the time. What other excuse do you need to load up a pile of Blu-rays and fall into your sofa?



If that's your gameplan this winter, then we're here to help. First with tech reviews: cherry-pick a new 4K TV from Sony's ZD9 cover star, or more affordable options from Hisense and Finlux. Indulge in some new sonic thrills courtesy of kit from SVS, Denon, Q Acoustics, Wharfedale or ATC. Or simply check out our annual awards special, **where we reveal our favourite hardware buys of the year.**

And the movies? If it's 4K Blu-ray you're interested in, this issue we hunt for pristine picture quality with a slate of new releases, while our Playback section runs from big-budget sci-fi to superhero TV and 1970s cult classics. Grab a disc and settle in!

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Jon Thompson:
Film producer and post-production expert delves deep into Hollywood and AV



Steve May:
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



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Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



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Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

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BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** LOEWE New Klang 1 speaker to match brand's designer TVs
REALIZER Headphones with Auro-3D, Atmos and DTS:X support **HUMAX** Media player that's full of beans... **BLU-RAY SALES** Hi-def discs are on the up in shops **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-sized chunks **SAUSAGE PARTY** Tasty 'toon lines up 4K release & MORE!

Birthday presence

REL Acoustics No.25 → www.rel.net

REL is marking its 25th anniversary with a new reference-grade subwoofer. Billed as the 'largest, most powerful and technologically advanced' bass bin the brand has ever made, the £6,500 No.25 features a 15in lightweight carbon fibre driver (with 4in excursion) and 1,000W amplifier. Twin parametric equalizers strive to deliver a uniform in-room response, while the cabinet is hewn from 1.1in-thick MDF with hardwood bracing. And you probably celebrate your birthday with a slice of cake and *Jaws* on Blu-ray...



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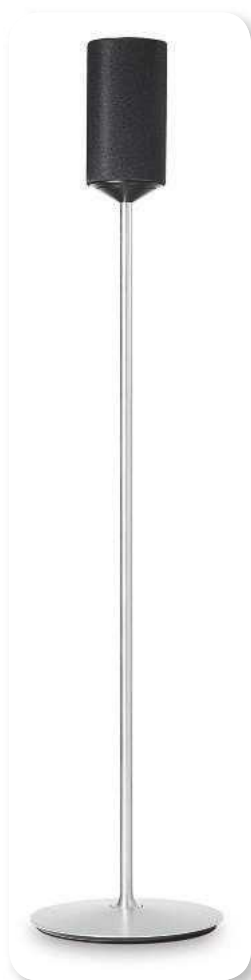
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Loewe drops a Klander, etc

Loewe Klang 1 → www.loewe.tv

With a name that literally means 'sound' in German, Loewe's Klang 1 is a discreet cylindrical satellite speaker designed for both stereo and multichannel duties. Each 17cm-high cabinet houses a 3in full-range drive unit and is wrapped in a black acoustic material that hides all screws

and fixings. The premium AV brand suggests partnering the Klang 1 with its recent Subwoofer 300, which has two onboard 75W modules to drive the speakers; a Loewe TV; or your own amplifier. Pricing is £450-per-pair and various stand options are available.



Hisense adds to curved 4K line



Hisense has introduced a new low-cost curved 4K TV to complement its higher-spec

designs. The 55in 55M600 will sell for just £700 through the brand's usual retail channels (including AO and Amazon), and features HDR compatibility in addition to its native 4K resolution. Sonic delivery is handled by dbx-TV's Total Technology DSP; smart features include 4K-capable apps for Netflix, Amazon Video and YouTube, as well as BBC iPlayer and Wuaki.TV. www.hisense.co.uk

Memorable movies from Vivitek?



Promising a 'home cinema experience to remember,' Vivitek's new H5098 is a Full HD-resolution

DLP projector with a claimed 2,000 Lumens output and 50,000:1 contrast ratio. Contributing to its £2,200 price tag is VividMotion frame interpolation tech, 3D playback (and 2D-3D conversion), vertical/horizontal lens shift, and 12V trigger and dual HDMI inputs. The standard lens offers a 1.54-1.93:1 throw ratio – long and short-throw options are also available. www.vivitek.eu

Atmos from your cans!

Crowdfunded processor creates 16-channel sonics for headphones

Northern Ireland-based corp Smyth Research Ltd. has announced the Realiser-A16 audio processor, which recreates immersive 3D audio over stereo headphones. The unit claims to render up to sixteen virtual loudspeakers in any location.

Brother duo Stephen and Mike Smyth, CEO and COO respectively, have used Kickstarter to fund development of their multi-functional box, which aims for a virtual soundfield totally indistinguishable from the room characteristics in which the listener is seated. Able to recreate up to 16 channels of audio with conventional stereo headphones, the A16 can simulate immersive, object-based audio formats including Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D.

The Realiser-A16 is targeted at late-night indulgers of Atmos Blu-rays or video games who don't wish to disturb the household, or simply those saving on the clutter and expense of 11 or more speakers.

Multichannel magic trick

HCC got to sample the kit at the recent Indulgence Show in London. For the demo, we were seated in the sweet spot of a 7.1.4 multichannel speaker array,

and asked to place a microphone in each ear to measure HRTF (Head-Related Transfer Function), a response that characterises how each ear will receive sound from any given point in the space. With headphones now on, Mike Smyth played a sequence from the Dolby Atmos disc of *Unbroken* from a Blu-ray player linked directly via HDMI to the A16. The act of tilting the head forwards disabled the Realiser box and the external speakers in the room would kick in automatically. The soundfield 'outside' the phones and that 'inside' the phones appeared truly identical.

An associated head-tracking function means the position of the listener is replicated by the virtual space in the 'phones. If, for example, you turn to face the left-wall surround channel, the direct audio from that channel now appears on-axis. Preset room characteristics come pre-installed (enabling a user to select a favoured cinema, dubbing studio or concert hall), and more real world acoustic options are scheduled to be made available via download from Smyth Research's 'Virtual Audio Exchange'.

Inventor Stephen Smyth, who has a background in developing coding systems for DTS, tells HCC: 'The Realiser-A16 can create the sound of any room or auditorium, as if the listener were actually there. For example, users can watch a movie at home, but acoustically be listening to the movie soundtrack as if they were actually in a movie theatre.'

The Realiser-A16 allows for 3D audio formats to be decoded internally via HDMI bitstream. Additionally, discrete audio signals can be sourced from USB and analogue (16-channel), HDMI (eight-channel), and SPDIF and line-level inputs (two-channel). Stephen Smyth says the company is taking advance orders for the A16, available in August of 2017, at a discounted price of US \$1,450 (plus VAT), although the eventual street price is slated to be \$500 more.

The A16 aims to replicate your own room or a preset cinema

Playlist...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

Lucy (UHD Blu-ray)

Luc Besson's bonkers 2014 sci-fi/action flick unleashes even more dazzling eye-candy in this 4K HDR incarnation. The disc's upgraded Dolby Atmos soundtrack is no slouch either.



The Iron Giant (All-region BD)



Brad Bird's animated masterpiece finally gets the Blu-ray it deserves with this feature-packed platter from Warner Bros.

The Neon Demon (Region B BD)



Nicolas Winding Refn's stylish and twisted psychological horror looks utterly ravishing in hi-def.

Venture Bros: Season Six (All-region BD – US Import)



A new setting brings new drama and new laughs in the latest season of this geek-tastic 'toon.

Twilight's Last Gleaming (Region B BD)



Robert Aldrich's 1977 military thriller is a welcome addition to the Masters of Cinema lineup.



At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Bad Santa 2

November 25: This long-awaited sequel to the 2003 festive box office hit finds Billy Bob Thornton's boozy, foul-mouthed department store Santa setting out to rob a Chicago charity. Expect plenty of filthy antics and a corresponding amount of guffaws.

Moana



December 02: If the trailers are any indication, it looks like Disney will keep its winning streak going with this CG 'toon about a Polynesian princess and a legendary demigod searching for a fabled island.

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story



December 15: This *Star Wars* spin-off promises a more serious war movie vibe as it dials back the clock to show how the Rebels stole the plans for the Death Star. Will it do as well as *Force Awakens*?



Blu-ray posts solid figures

Blockbusters help HD sales, while 4K is outperforming expectations

UK Blu-ray sales are growing as DVD continues to decline, according to a survey of third-quarter 2016 data (July, August, September) by research firm Kantar.

In this period, the share of total physical video sales enjoyed by the hi-def format was up 12 per cent on last year. Growth was helped, says Fiona Keenan, Kantar's Strategic Insight Director, Entertainment & Telecomms, by 'big action releases particularly well-suited to viewing in high-definition' – such as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Captain America: Civil War*.

And it would be no surprise to see Blu-ray continue to grab market share in the last quarter of 2016, with the likes of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens 3D*, *X-Men: Apocalypse* and *Star Trek Beyond* to woo HD TV owners, not to mention the Black Friday and pre-Christmas sales.

Interestingly, the latest figures also showed HMV, which only three-and-a-half years ago was in administration, overtaking Amazon to become the UK's biggest music retailer.

4K TV base expands

Kantar's stats don't differentiate between Blu-ray and Ultra HD Blu-ray. However, from across the Pond, the Blu-ray Disc Association (BDA) is also crowing

about the strength of physical media, and 4K in particular, tied to the prevalence of Ultra HD TVs.

HDGuru reports that 2016 has seen Ultra HD resolution ranked as the most-wanted feature by new television buyers, according to the BDA.

4K TVs, first launched in 2012, are tipped to account for 16 per cent of all models in the US by the end of the year, and 50 per cent by 2020. And, naturally, owners of such hardware are seeking content to play. More than \$25m has been taken at tills via UHD disc sales, buoyed by a healthy slate of titles that looks likely to reach the targeted figure of 100 by 2017. As reported previously in *HCC*, UHD Blu-ray is ahead of Blu-ray in terms of software takeup at the same period in the format's life (2016 v 2006).

'It's doing better than forecast,' says Sony Pictures' senior VP Don Eklund. '[We're] very happy with the Ultra HD Blu-ray performance so far.'

As well as Sony, the UHD BD format is now supported by Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros, Twentieth Century Fox, Universal Pictures and Lionsgate. Disney, however, remains a no-show, meaning the *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, Pixar and Marvel catalogues have yet to see UHD releases – and there's no official word yet on that changing.



Humax launches hybrid player

Compact 'Espresso' streamer syncs with brand's FVP-4000T PVR and HD camera

Humax has unveiled its H3 Espresso media player that mixes access to live TV with streaming platforms, DLNA file playback and integration with some of its other products.

The H3, available for £80, offers a 1080p output via its HDMI connection, optical digital audio output for sound system hookup, and Ethernet and Wi-Fi to hop onto your network. Once online, it can be used to view pre-installed apps including YouTube and Netflix, plus 55 free-to-air channels through the TV Player service, which also includes additional PPV premium channels (a free two-month subscription is included).

In addition, the Espresso can be used as a media player, streaming video, music and images from DLNA devices or from USB.

The feature set expands if you also own Humax's FVP-4000T Freeview Play PVR. Pair the devices and recorded programmes can be accessed from the PVR's HDD, and multiple Espressos can be linked to the home network for multiroom use. The H3 also integrates with Humax's Eye HD camera to view recordings. www.humaxdigital.com/uk

The 10-cm wide H3 Espresso can stream HDD recordings from Humax's FVP-4000T PVR



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Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

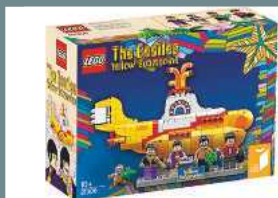
Guillermo del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth



Released upon the film's 10th anniversary, this superb tome (subtitled 'Inside the

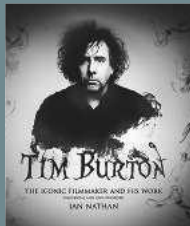
Creation of a Modern Fairy Tale') delves into the archives to provide the definitive account of *Pan's Labyrinth's* production. From interviews with key players to rare photos and art, it's one of the most in-depth and informative books of its kind. The £30 price is entirely justified.

LEGO: The Beatles – Yellow Submarine



The latest release in the fan-suggested LEGO Ideas line is this colourful recreation of the iconic vehicle from the psychedelic 1968 animated film of the same name. Priced £50 and made from 550 pieces, the pack includes minifig versions of John, Paul, George and Ringo, plus a cute little Jeremy Hillary Boob.

Tim Burton: The Iconic Filmmaker and His Work



Reading like a labour of love for author Ian Nathan, this high-quality hardback probably

won't convert those who dislike the filmmaker, but is a must-read for fans. Laden with insightful analysis, Nathan's book explores the themes and tropes of each of Burton's movies and even finds something nice to say about his *Planet of the Apes* remake! Available for £25.

Onkyo raises the roof

Dolby Atmos/DTS:X soundbar joins AV receivers in next-gen lineup

Onkyo will enter the nascent Dolby Atmos/DTS:X soundbar arena in January with a debut model that also supports DTS Play-Fi music streaming and uses an external control centre to keep the main design neat and tidy.

The LS7200 '3D Soundbar System' will hit shops in the new year priced at £900, and do battle with other Atmos bars from Samsung and Yamaha. The former's HW-K950 sells for around £1,300 but isn't DTS:X-capable; the latter's YSP-5600 does do DTS:X but costs £1,500.

The Onkyo system is a three-piece design, combining a soundbar unit with a wireless subwoofer and separate 'AV Centre' – there are no additional wireless rears here.

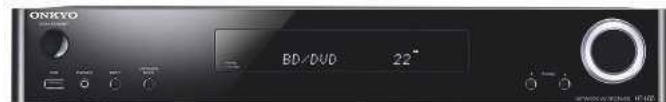
The soundbar element keeps a low profile at just 53mm high and is wall-mountable. It features dual drivers for left, right and centre channels, plus single up-firing units for height-channel effects, at either end. Combined with the downfiring subwoofer, the result is a 3.1.2 system, although onboard Dolby Surround Enhancer technology purports to create a wraparound soundfield with virtual rear speakers.

DTS Neural:X is also included to upmix standard multichannel audio. Additional options to play with are a Direct Mode for straight-thru stereo replay, a Late Night setting, and DSP presets for gaming and music playback.

Separate switching

Onkyo's AV Centre is where the LS7200 breaks from the soundbar norm. This is an external processor unit that also houses connections (including four HDMI inputs and an HDMI ARC out), plus amplification, 40-preset FM tuner and tone controls.

Handling setup and room EQ is Onkyo's AccuEQ calibration system, which the brand claims will



The slim-line 'AV Centre' is the heart of Onkyo's Atmos system

tailor the LS7200's sonic performance to suit the listener's environment via output level, distance and crossover adjustment.

'Object-based audio has made huge strides since we helped launch Dolby Atmos,' says Onkyo PR and Product Development Consultant Kulwinder Singh Rai. 'The time is now right for the technology to go fully mainstream... and that means a soundbar-type solution.'

'The reality is that modern housing is becoming increasingly compact so many home cinema fans simply don't have the luxury of being able to rig up complex multichannel speaker systems. The LS7200 targets those folk who are sold on the benefits of object-based audio but simply don't have the space for a more purist setup.'

Let's play the music

Onkyo is positioning its soundbar as not just a movie machine, of course. Beyond the headline Atmos/DTS:X support, the unit will incorporate Apple AirPlay, FireConnect and DTS Play-Fi streaming features following an eventual firmware update. The latter employs a free app for iOS and Android that collects music (streaming services, local files, or network-attached audio) into a simple interface for casting to any Wi-Fi-enabled speaker. Multiple streams to different speakers are possible.

Spotify Connect, Bluetooth, dual-band Wi-Fi and Tidal and TuneIn (via Onkyo's Controller app) open other music avenues. 'The LS7200 has been designed from the outset to be a proper "do-it-all" entertainment solution,' says Singh Rai.

The soundbar uses dual drivers for left/centre/right, plus single upfiring units at each end



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Xbox gets an audio upgrade
As a gateway to the world of 4K HDR home entertainment, the Xbox One S console has much to recommend it – except for the bizarre lack of support for object-based audio formats due to the console not supporting bitstream audio output. Thankfully a fix is on the way, with Microsoft revealing that it plans to correct the issue with a firmware update in the new year. The announcement only mentioned Dolby Atmos compatibility, though – not DTS:X.

2 Sky's the limit with LG TVs
LG has teamed up with Sky to offer a tempting bundle. Anyone buying one of the brand's 2016 4K OLED or Super UHD TVs can grab Sky Q (plus an Original Bundle subscription) for either 12 or six months depending on screen model. For full terms, visit www.lg.com/uk/skyq.

3 Meridian gets the DTs
Meridian Audio continues to bolster its high-end AV portfolio by partnering with projection screen supplier DT Screens. 'Working together with DT Screens allows us to expand our offering so that we can provide a comprehensive home cinema solution,' says Meridian's marketing honcho Rayner Sheridan.

4 Arcam upgrades app
Arcam has added the Tidal and Qobuz streaming services, plus 'net radio and podcasts, to its Solo Music and Solo Movie one-box systems, CDS27 CD player and UDP411 Blu-ray player via the late October release of its MusicLife 1.3.0 streaming app. MusicLife 1.3.1 (which made additional tweaks and was released just days later) is now available from iTunes.

5 Donnie returns to cinemas
Arrow Films has announced that its new 4K restoration of *Donnie Darko* (see p82) will be getting a cinema release to mark the movie's 15th anniversary. The theatrical cut will have an exclusive run at the BFI from December 16, before going nationwide the following week.

6 Crowdfunding horror
Nucleus Films is the latest UK indie to turn to crowdfunding to finance the restoration of titles for release on Blu-ray. The company has been running an Indiegogo campaign throughout November to raise the £20,000 needed to produce new 2K restorations of Italian cult flicks *Death Laid an Egg* (1967) and *Lady Frankenstein* (1971) from the original negatives. At the time of writing, with 22 days left to go, it had already raised over £16,750.

7 Well spotted!
Thanks to reader Neil Cushing for pointing out that the LG Blu-ray player pictured in our review last issue was not the BP556, but was in fact the similar-but-not-the same BP550.

8 Branded Bluetooth
Ruark Audio has joined forces with DJ and producer Martin Buttrich on a limited edition run of its MR1 Bluetooth speakers. Priced £330, the redesigned MR1 boasts the same features, but now comes encased in a 'luxurious' hand-crafted wood exterior featuring Martin's signature branding on the side.

9 Q Acoustics expands
Following a successful launch in the US earlier this year, Q Acoustics has embarked on the next phases of its plan for world domination (or just global expansion) by launching a range of its audio kit in Canada. The brand has also revamped its UK/European website (www.qacoustics.co.uk) with 360-degree views of its products.

10 BFI teases 2017 Blu-rays
The BFI has let slip its lineup of Blu-ray releases for the first three months of 2017 and there's plenty for film fans to get excited about. Among the highlights are new restorations of Charlie Chaplin's legendary *Essanay Comedies* in January, the re-scheduled release of Oscar-winner *The Crying Game* in February and world debut Blu-ray outings in March for Martin Scorsese's *Who's That Knocking at My Door* and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (pictured).



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Knight Rider returns



Justin Lin may have taken time out from directing *Fast & Furious* sequels to helm *Star Trek Beyond*, but he just can't seem to stay away from fast cars. Not only has he signed up to direct a *Hot Wheels* movie, he's also partnering with digital network Machinima Inc. to reboot the 'classic' 1980s action series *Knight Rider*.

Star Wars scoundrel

Community and *The Martian* actor Donald Glover has been cast as young Lando Calrissian in the upcoming *Han Solo Star Wars* spin-off movie. The film is currently set to hit screens in May 2018.

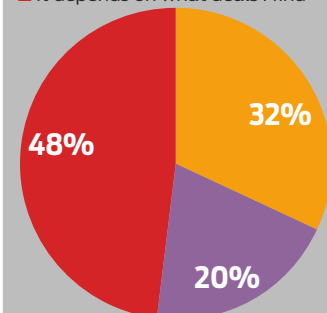
Uncharted director

The *Uncharted* movie has a new director. *A Night at the Museum's* Shawn Levy has signed on to the screen adaptation of the hit videogame. There's no word yet on whether he'll use the script written by Joe Carnahan, who dropped out of the project due to a timing clash with *Bad Boys 3*.

We asked...

Are you planning to buy any new AV kit this Christmas?

- Yes, I already have my wishlist
- No, I'm happy with my setup
- It depends on what deals I find

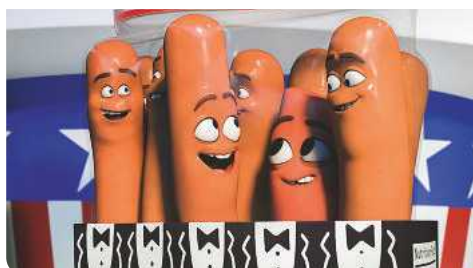


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4K food for thought

Sausage Party → Sony Pictures → DVD, Blu-ray, Ultra HD Blu-ray

Pineapple Express co-creators Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg are the twisted masterminds behind this side-splitting CGI spoof of Disney and Pixar films; an adults-only 'toon following a hot dog sausage who discovers the horrifying truth about the fate that awaits him and his equally delicious chums. Presuming you're not too stuffed with turkey, you'll be able to feast on *Sausage Party* on DVD, BD and Ultra HD Blu-ray from December 26, with the 4K platter also promising a tasty Atmos audio mix.



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Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

What's your fave 4K experience so far?



UHD discs are *The Revenant* and *X-Men: Apocalypse*.
Paul McGroarty

For me, it's still *The Revenant*, but there are some stunning 4K YouTube videos available!
Mark Edwards

Pacific Rim: the 3D was face-melting and the post-HDR pass is retina-scorching.
Mike Wadkins

What you're watching on your home cinema...



The Shallows 4K, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* 4K and *Star Trek Beyond* 4K.

Ian Cooper

Well, as the nights are getting dark and the clocks have gone back, weekend evenings are for watching movies. This week's three will be disaster flicks: *The Day After Tomorrow*, 2012 and *San Andreas*.
Chris Sayles

It might fry my brain, but I've gone for the Season 1-4 boxset of *Arrow*!
Robert Corrigan

Thought we might have an *American Pie* marathon, minus the crap ones with none of the original cast in them, obviously...
Matt Greaves



Are you kidding? *Battlefield 1* came out today. Fire up the projector because I'm going over the top!
Barrie Head

It'll be *Cell* and *Turtles: Out of the Shadows* for us.
Angela Graham



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Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



They're back!

Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* isn't due in cinemas 'til April 2017, but here's a 'sneak peek' trailer to keep fans of the outer-space heroes ticking over. No plot reveals to worry about, just the expected pop-tastic soundtrack, set-piece extravaganzas and humour-laden dialogue.
youtu.be/sD9NVxYRzS



Blink and you'll miss it

Aside from the bizarre instrumental music, this five-minute time-lapse video showing the construction of a custom-built home cinema room (by UK Home Cinemas) is a good reference point for anyone considering a big AV makeover. Star ceiling, seating plinth, in-wall speakers – they're all here!
youtu.be/HyvXJDYGdRg



Gentle Ben

Filed at the recent BFI Film Festival, this lengthy interview/Q&A with affable British director Ben Wheatley (*Sightseers*, *High Rise*) sees him go into plenty of detail about working methods and the production of next year's *Free Fire*. And he's wearing a t-shirt that fans of *The Thing* will recognise...
youtu.be/rbnoFB_n5b4



Four score and ten

We all know Onkyo as a purveyor of home cinema receivers; the fact it once manufactured televisions may come as a surprise. Wood cabinet TVs are just one of the retro highlights in this video timeline the Japanese AV giant has cooked up to celebrate its 70th anniversary.
youtu.be/loQ0FnMT8SI



TOP PICK

Logan's third run

With the third standalone Wolverine movie – simply called *Logan* – it looks like studio 20th Century Fox is continuing with the somewhat dark and brooding tone that characterised the previous franchise entry. Which suits use fine. The film lands in March 2017; here's the debut trailer.
youtu.be/Div0IP65aZo



How's stat?

The Blu-ray Disc Association has launched a number-crunching microsite to explain exactly why Ultra HD BD is worth getting excited about, even including the nugget that 4K TVs offer '27 times as many pixels as standard-definition televisions.' Share it without your non-techie friends.
www.uhdbdinnumbers.com

Mounting excitement

Sanus VMF620 → www.sanus.com



Mount specialist Sanus has outed its new VMF620 TV wallmount designed for flatscreens up to 50in and weighing up to 34kg – surely enough to accommodate your second-room screen. Helping you keep an eye on the action and maintain a good viewing angle is the VESA-certified mount's 180-degree swivel function; the three-arm system also offers 20in extension and vertical alignment. To aid a tidy installation, the unit's hollow supports allow for hidden cable management while maintaining easy access. The VMF620 is available now, priced £150.

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'Santa baby, slip a cable under the for me...'

Make sure you get the right Christmas gifts by buying them for yourself. **Team HCC** draws up a system-boosting wishlist of AV accessories, movie memorabilia, software, books and more

Now TV Smart Box

We've been besotted with Now TV's low-cost, flexible approach to TV streaming since it first launched in 2013; new this year is a slightly bigger box that adds an extra layer of functionality while still keeping the price tag sensible (£40). So what is the new trick, exactly? A digital TV tuner. Not 4K playback, then, but it does make the Now TV hardware all-encompassing when it comes to telly content, integrating PPV Sky (movies, sport, entertainment and kids bundles) with terrestrial catchup and live TV (with pause/rewind function). Not to mention the plethora of other apps and media playback skills on offer.

www.nowtv.com



PSB Imagine XA

Add an Atmos sprinkle to your speaker setup with these Dolby-certified upfiring speakers from Canadian brand PSB. £350 gets you a pair of Imagine XAs, designed to perch atop existing floorstander or standmount speakers; their angled baffle and bespoke grille then fire Atmos-channel audio to reflect off your ceiling. The two-way driver array packs enough bass punch and HF sparkle to work with whatever a sound engineer may choose to throw up there.

www.psbSpeakers.com



Sony PlayStation 4 Pro

Okay, it won't spin Ultra HD BDs, but a new PS console is always worth consideration, particularly as this 'Pro' update of the regular PS4 does feature 4K gaming support. HDR is provided out-of-the-box, too (and is now an option on the original PS4 via a firmware update). Available for £350, the console has also had a slight design refresh to accompany its beefed-up spec. Want your games to be faster, sharper and generally better-looking? Stick this in your stocking.

www.playstation.com





Vivitek QUMI Q8

Pico projectors aren't a new concept, but the QUMI Q8 from Vivitek raises an eyebrow by offering a Full HD resolution in addition to the usual carry-around form factor (19cm deep, 11cm wide, 4cm high and 621g). A single HDMI input deals with your BD deck, console or set-top box, Wi-Fi connectivity enables quickfire screen mirroring and a USB port can be used for home media files. Brightness is rated at 1,000 Lumens from the unit's 30,000-hour LED engine. The £850 price tag includes a three-year warranty. www.vivitek.eu



Sony MDR-HW700DS

Still our favourite when it comes to surround sound headphones, Sony's over-ear set features large 50mm drivers, a rechargeable internal battery for wireless use and comes supplied with an outboard HDMI-equipped transmission unit (also a four-in, one-out switcher). Employ this to hive off multichannel BD soundtracks which the HW700DS then reconfigures to its 9.1 DSP-crafted soundfield with real panache. The enveloping performance (and impressively dynamic presentation) make the £400 ticket worthwhile. www.sony.co.uk



Amazon Prime

The Prime video-on-demand service from the monster e-tailer brings a healthy selection of original programming and big studio flicks (with Ultra HD and HDR embellishments on some titles) but that's not the only draw of a £79 (per year) or £7.99 (per month) subscription – Amazon also chucks in free next-day delivery on tons of items (including many Blu-rays), access to the Prime Music streaming platform, plus cloud storage. An excellent choice for a click-happy AV-Holic. www.amazon.co.uk/prime

D-Link AC1900 Wi-Fi Exo

If a robust Wi-Fi signal is an integral part of your AV life, an after-market router might be in order. Not only does D-Link's AC1900 Wi-Fi Exo (£180) have the benefit of looking like a CIA attack drone, it promises data rates up to 1,300Mbps/s (5GHz) and 600Mbps/s (2.4GHz), features a four-port Gigabit Ethernet switch and sports parental controls and a QoS (Quality of Service) engine to manage the connections of multiple devices. www.dlink.com/uk



Stocking up

And then there's this sort of thing for under £25

Game of Thrones Baking Moulds

HBO has decided to marry the UK's baking obsession to its hit fantasy show. Use these £16 moulds to create a showstopping cake that pledges allegiance to either the Starks or the Targaryens. www.hboshopecu.com

Couch Coaster

For those who can't stop spilling drinks in the dark, the £20 Couch Coaster latches on to the arm of your sofa to provide your beverage with a vice-like (okay, plastic) grip. www.couchcoaster.com

The Chord Company Clearway

Indulge in setup pimping with the Clearway speaker cable, a dual-layer shielded oxygen-free copper design. Price is £10/metre unterminated; banana, BFA and spade connectors are an option. www.chord.co.uk



KEF LS50 Wireless

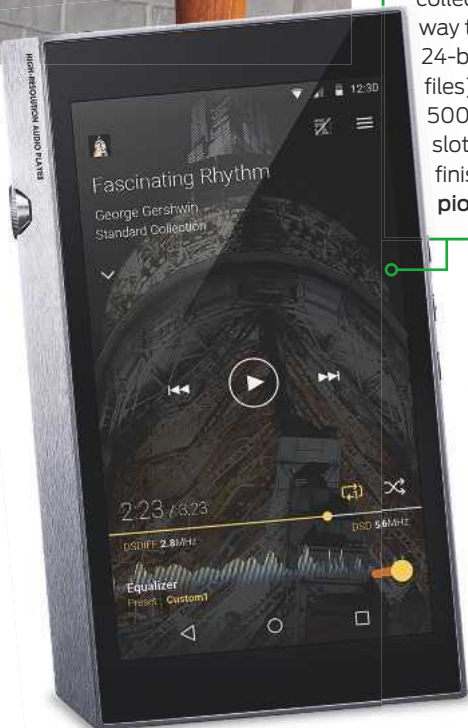
The £2,000 ticket of KEF's latest wireless speaker pair means you might have to cancel all other Christmas activities, but at least you can kick back with a premium music performance while the rest of the household dines on raw sprouts. These active versions of the brand's LS50 standmounts pack a whopping 2 x 230W amplification, time-aligning DSP control and cater for 24-bit music playback depending on source – Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, USB, optical and phono are the connection options. www.kef.com/gb

Pioneer XDP-300R

Hi-res audio on the go is the ethos of Pioneer's new XDP-300R, which joins the existing XDP-100R but adds some silicon refinements and a balanced headphone output for high-end cans. Using the Android OS brings access to plenty of music and movie content apps, in addition to in-built Tidal, Spotify, OnkyoMusic and Deezer clients. Memory for your collection (ranging all the way to DSD 11.2MHz and 24-bit/384kHz FLAC/WAV files) can be expanded to 500GB via dual microSD slots. Black or silver finishes, £600 approx. pioneer-audiovisual.eu

Chromecast Audio

Smarten up a 'dumb' speaker (a normal one, in other words) with Google's £30 Wi-Fi gadget. Chromecast Audio plugs in to your speaker via a 3.5mm cable (optical and phono options are available), and is then ready to stream from compatible music apps (Spotify, TuneIn, YouTube Music etc) over your network. The AKM DAC handles 24-bit/96kHz files. www.google.com



Blu-rays...



Middle-earth 6-Film Collection

This could be the one BD boxset to rule them all as far as Peter Jackson's Tolkien adventures are concerned. The original *Lord of the Rings* flicks are joined by *The Hobbit*... trilogy (all with their extended cuts) in a £300 set that sees faux leather disc cases sitting in a wooden shelf. Also includes a 100-page book, concept art watercolours and the usual Mount Doom of extras.



Knight Rider: The Complete Collection

Black leather jackets, luxurious hairstyles and squealing tyres abound in the cult 1980s TV series starring David Hasselhoff and his AI-powered Pontiac Trans-AM, here making its hi-def debut in a monster £150 Blu-ray set featuring all 90 episodes spread across 20 discs. They've even rustled up some extras to accompany the restored 1080p visuals.



Smokey and the Bandit: The Complete Collection

Almost a companion piece to *Knight Rider*, this trilogy of 1970s/1980s car-crammed, stunt-filled, pregnant elephant-laden action comedies lands on Blu-ray courtesy of Fabulous Films' £40 boxset. There are no extras here, but at least star Burt Reynolds' winning smile dazzles in HD, and the debut flick is accompanied by a DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundmix.

...& Games



Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare

Recently launched for PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC, the latest entry in Activision's first-person shooter franchise features the usual single and multi-player modes, but sees the narrative gain a futuristic setting dripping with all sorts of sci-fi tropes. Pick it up in Legacy Edition guise to also get a 'remastered' release of previous 2007 title *Modern Warfare*.

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Shudder

What's Shudder? It's a VOD service, backed by AMC, that focuses exclusively on fright flicks, both old and new. Available on various devices, including Roku, a subscription is £4.99 per month. www.shudder.com

Batman Projector Light



A little bit of low-level lighting goes a long way in a cinema

room to reduce eye-strain. This 360-degree rotatable lamp (£25) can also be used to cast a Bat-Signal onto the wall! www.red5.co.uk

Iron Man Cookie Jar

Show support for one side of the Marvel Civil War by filling this £25 replica Iron Man helmet with Hobnobs and stuffing your face. www.red5.co.uk

Doctor Who: The Whoniverse & Whographica

The Whoniverse is a new compendium from BBC Books to guide you through the battle-scarred history of the planets and alien races of Auntie's cult sci-fi series. If you've ever wanted to know why the Weeping Angels are so evil, this 320-page hardback is for you. Also recently launched is the *Whographica* infographic encyclopedia, a colourful tome which runs through the numbers and quirky statistics of the show. Prices are £23 and £12 respectively. www.penguin.co.uk



Deadpool: Drawing the Merc with the Mouth

The smash hit Ryan Reynolds movie has ignited interest in swearsy superhero Deadpool, and this deluxe art book from Titan traces his development over three decades from spin-off character to series headliner, via interviews and a plethora of illustrations. £35. www.titanbooks.com



HR Giger

Taschen has released this celebration of the late illustrator's astonishing artwork (although curation actually began before his death in 2014) that focuses on HR Giger's expansive career from film collaborations (*Alien!*) to album covers. Limited to 1,000 copies and signed for authenticity, it also includes an essay by Giger scholar Andreas J Hirsch and seven fold-out spreads. At £650 it's hardly an impulse purchase, but then alternate Art Editions (which come with supplementary sculptures) are even more expensive... www.taschen.com

Blu-rays...



Star Wars: The Force Awakens 3D Collector's Ed.

There's no good reason why this 3D BD edition of the mega-blockbuster couldn't have been released at the same time as the 2D platter this Summer, other than to make Disney huge piles of cash. But...*Force Awakens* fans will no doubt want to double-dip, as there are new bonus bits (including a director's chat track) in addition to the stereoscopic presentation.



Star Trek: 50th Anniversary Limited Ed.

Trade a hundred of your Earth pounds for this bumper collection of Captain Kirk *et al* sci-fi japes – the original series, the animated series, and films from *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* to...*The Undiscovered Country* all feature, in addition to a 'collectible' Starfleet Insignia badge and a new five-part retrospective documentary looking at the franchise's legacy.



4K Ultra HD: The Premiere Collection

Fox has released an Ultra HD Blu-ray starter pack for those looking to reap the rewards of a new AV setup. This £75 ensemble features *The Revenant*, *The Life of Pi*, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, *Independence Day* and *The Maze Runner*. So, four out of six ain't bad... Note that Full HD Blu-ray versions aren't also included.

...& Games



LEGO Dimensions Expansion Packs

The interactive toy/console title (where physical LEGO pieces can 'enter' the game via a USB-linked pad) has been expanded with packs themed around the likes of *The A-Team*, *Adventure Time*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Harry Potter*. The new releases also introduce Battle Arenas for the first time, giving you the chance to play Capture the Flag with B.A. Baracus or Ethan Hunt.

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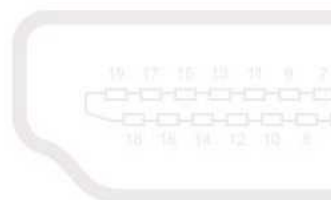
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ULTRA HD BLU-RAY EXPLOSION



Movie studios are releasing more and more new titles on 4K disc, while heading into their back catalogues to dig up fan favourites for an HDR makeover. John Archer gets goggle-eyed with a selection of recent platters >

Labyrinth: 30th Anniversary Edition

LABYRINTH FEELS AT times rather awkward, laboured and, yes, 'of its time'. With the combined creative forces of Jim Henson, David Bowie, Terry Jones and George Lucas infused into almost every frame, though, it's blissfully impossible to separate *Labyrinth* from the nostalgia associated with a pre-CGI era willing to back real imagination over endless formulaic sequels. As such it's a title every serious film fan should own. Is it worth stumping up for the UHD Blu-ray version, though?

Yes, it is. Derived from a 4K scan of an original 35mm negative, the UHD BD enjoys a much more detailed appearance than the standard BD. This makes the image feel fresher, more alive, and more natural, as well as adding to your appreciation of the artistry involved in crafting all the sets and puppets.

The fantastical locations – especially the Oubliette – also look more magical thanks to the extra luminosity and contrast introduced by the disc's HDR support, and while colours don't generally look much more vivid than they do on the BD, they're noticeably more subtle, again making the film's creature creations more immediate and 'alive'.

People accustomed to the ultra-smooth, polished finishes associated with most UHD BDs might be startled by the amount of grain visible in the *Labyrinth* transfer. However, while there is a slightly processed look to some of this grain, it's mostly no more than you should expect with a faithful 4K scan of an 80s-era 35mm negative. Plus, the grain arguably helps hide any artificiality in the film's sets and puppets.

The new Dolby Atmos soundtrack isn't quite as effective as I'd hoped, only really wow-ing with the extra dimensionality during the most dramatic moments and the song-and-dance numbers. It also leaves Bowie's songs sounding slightly less engaging than they do with the simpler Dolby mix. It's still good to see Sony going to the trouble of adding Atmos to such an old title, though.

Wrapping up this 30th Anniversary package is an extensive suite of extra features, including a fantastic commentary by conceptual designer Brian Froud, and a brilliant retrospective documentary on the making of the film and its legacy.

Overall, this 4K outing for *Labyrinth* reintroduces a classic fantasy film to a new generation and proves that, if used properly, the format can be every bit as important to old films as the latest blockbusters.

The original 35mm negative has been used for the disc's 4K master





Oblivion

I KNOW THAT *Oblivion* has its fans, but to me this Tom Cruise sci-fi vehicle still feels mostly like a B-movie that doesn't fulfil its ambitions or nail its premise. Still, I had hoped for a stellar Ultra HD Blu-ray transfer, given the demo-grade quality of its HD Blu-ray release. Unfortunately this doesn't work out.

The main problem is that while you'll sometimes see an increase in sharpness and detail, there are just as many times where the picture actually manages to look softer than the Blu-ray, which is a neat trick...

The UHD BD does at least enjoy some benefit from both HDR and the format's wider colour palette. The former makes the image appear more contrast-rich (although actually less bright) than the Blu-ray, while the latter introduces subtler tones to the predominantly stark colour swatch, as well as upping the intensity and thematic punch of rare moments of colour, such as Jack's secret 'paradise.'

This is far from an essential upgrade, although the audio mix is now offered in Atmos, rather than DTS-HD MA 7.1.

Snow White and The Huntsman

WHILE IT'S NICE to see Hollywood take a dark approach to a fairy tale, *Snow White and The Huntsman* is too disjointed and too unsure what age group it wants to appeal to deliver a really convincing and immersive ride.

It does deliver a reasonably impressive Ultra HD picture performance, though. The image is presumably derived from the film's cinema run, so there's an upscale going on. However, since the film was originally lensed on 35mm it has a slightly grainier finish than many UHD BDs, which tends to make 2K digital effects look less artificial than they often do, and hides the sort of inconsistencies seen with some other 2K upscales.

There's also a much more engaging look to the film's metallic costumes and fairy-tale settings thanks to HDR, while bolder, more nuanced colours give you a new appreciation of those fancy catwalk costumes the production crew clearly spent a fortune creating.

The Huntsman: Winter's War

AFTER A GOOD start, this *Snow White and The Huntsman* prequel degenerates into a laboured mess more concerned with Scottish accents and pretty visuals than telling an engaging story.

This focus on style over substance plays out nicely on UHD BD. Despite the disc seemingly being magically recreated in 4K from a 2K digital master, the image looks a little more detailed and certainly less speckly than that of the ordinary Blu-ray. Yet it's with HDR where this image really shines, especially in any shots featuring the gorgeously-lit 'Winter Queen'.

There's a significant colour advantage in areas like the exterior woodland, the Queen's palace and actors' skin tones. Some dark shots look a little washed out, however, and some CGI – such as a horned goblin – appear rather low-res versus the rest of the 4K picture.

Pacific Rim

IF YOU CAN forget that you're witnessing the worst alien invasion plan ever and just go with the big dumb flow, there's fun to be had with *Pacific Rim* – especially if you're an AV fan watching it on UHD BD.

This disc's new Atmos audio mix is outstandingly brutal but also endlessly imaginative, while the picture is often stunning. Particularly obvious is the extra intensity and richness of its colours versus the regular Blu-ray, with the film's holographic displays in particular exploding off the screen with laser-like intensity. Aggressive use of HDR helps give colours even more pop too, while enhancing the image's sense of depth, making the film's artificial light sources look incredibly bright, and helping to unearth detail in areas like the Jaeger pilots' shiny suits.

The UHD BD does only give a relatively marginal – though not insignificant – increase in real detail over the Blu-ray, but it's still a pleasure to watch and easily Warner's most consistent 4K release yet.





Warcraft: The Beginning

WARCRAFT IS ADMIRABLE for its attempt to bring gravitas to a computer game movie, full of hints of possible future glory, but a little hard to engage with, not least because many of the key characters are almost completely CGI. And this massive use of CGI may have contributed to its 4K release being one of the poorest I've seen. The standard Blu is rich in colour and detail; the addition of HDR and WCG to the UHD BD version leads, bizarrely, to a picture that's wan and washed out. Contrast is crushed too, making the BD the more dynamic option. This weird desaturation feels like a bid to stop the 4K resolution leaving the 2K-rendered effects (and 2K digital intermediate source) too exposed. Certainly the UHD BD doesn't look much more detailed than the BD.

The Atmos soundtrack is much more satisfying than the pictures – laden with prodigious amounts of bass, aggressive channel use and clear dialogue.



Star Trek

J.J. ABRAMS' *Star Trek* reboot brings together a pitch-perfect cast to deliver a sparky buddy movie in space with action and snappy one liners aplenty, and Paramount's back-catalogue UHD release captures the energy and fun more effectively than the standard Blu-ray, with everything from Starfleet uniforms to the lights of the retro *Enterprise* bridge looking radiant via the HDR brightness punch and expanded colour. Even the film's annoyingly overused lens flare effects appear seriously handsome.

In outer-space shots a greater contrast range creates some of the deepest, truest blacks you'll see, and while detail levels don't massively improve on the BD (this is another title derived from a 2K master) there's more texture in uniforms and skin detailing to be found in close-ups.

Not quite a demo-level UHD BD (despite new Dolby Atmos sonics), but certainly a nice upgrade on the 1080p release.



Star Trek Into Darkness

AN OVER-THE-TOP TURN by Benedict Cumberbatch, credulity-stretching plot points (even by *Star Trek* standards) and lots of inexplicable hand-to-hand fighting make *Into Darkness* the most relentlessly silly – if still kind of fun – *Star Trek* film to date.

Image quality mostly matches that of the first reboot, enjoying the same polished finish, rich colours and expanded contrast (and, again, the disc is rounded out by a new Atmos audio mix that will make it essential to some). It has an ace up its sleeve, though: around 30 minutes of IMAX footage. This opens the aspect ratio from 2.40:1 to 1.78:1 and dazzles with some interstellar visuals among the best 4K has provided so far. Detail levels become incredible, and even the colour and contrast shift up another gear. Although generally rather short, these sequences are worth lingering over.



The Da Vinci Code

RON HOWARD'S SLICK direction makes this the best Dan Brown adaptation yet, although it's still an oddly staid affair. And Tom Hanks' haircut doesn't help.

This UHD BD was created by scanning the original 35mm print for a 4K digital master – and the results are mostly gorgeous. Detail levels are superlative, with the 4K platter offering greater texture – including in the film's natural grain – than witnessed on the regular Blu-ray. Even more impressive is the expanded contrast range. Here there are natural, deep blacks (and plenty of shadow info) sharing screen space with sizzling highlights. It's particularly evident during night-time shots of Paris.

The colour scheme trounces the normal BD, too, leaving nearly every shot and setting feeling beautifully enriched. Overall, this is one of the most technically impressive UHD releases around. ➤

Make it play...

Want to spin a 4K Blu-ray? You'll need one of these

Xbox One S



A games machine-cum-4K spinner, Microsoft's new Xbox is a good-value buy in its 500GB, £250 guise. Initially released without Atmos/DTS:X support, the former has now been confirmed as coming via firmware update early next year.

Panasonic DMP-UB900

A great-quality offering from Panasonic, priced at £600, with musical leanings courtesy of multichannel analogue outputs and hi-res audio streaming chops. A step-down UB700 model (£400) is also available.

Samsung UBD-K8500

The first 4K player to break cover, Samsung's machine is now available for as little as £300. The plasticky build quality is a little uninspired, but dual HDMI outputs, media playing features and USB input are all offered.

Oppo UDP-203

Possibly in stores for around £600 by the time you read this, the 4K-capable UDP-203 replaces Oppo's BPD-103D, and carries over the SACD/DVD-A playback and HDMI inputs, but misses out on the Darbee post-processing.



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Djimon Hounsou rails against the 4K release of *The Legend of Tarzan*



Lone Survivor

LONE SURVIVOR RETELS the true story of a Navy SEAL who was the only soldier to survive a Taliban ambush in Afghanistan. A mix of gung-ho patriotism, slow-mo visuals and gritty realism, there's a certain power to it. Ultra HD visuals are fairly unremarkable, though, only delivering a mild improvement over the excellent Blu-ray. It likely doesn't help that the 5K-shot film received a 2K digital master; certainly the UHD disc seldom looks significantly more detailed than its 1080p brethren. Some shots suffer with a little motion blur, too, that isn't present on the BD.

The HDR and WCG makeover, on the other hand, work great with the cinematography. Exterior shots of the Afghan terrain (actually New Mexico) are rich and deep, with heat oozing from the screen (again, however, the standard BD presentation appears generally brighter). Interiors also enjoy markedly enhanced colour subtlety.

An added bonus is an aggressively steered DTS-X audio mix, which fans of the previously brilliant DTS-HD MA 5.1 track will love.

Ghostbusters [2016]

UNHELPFULLY, THE UHD platter on Sony's release only carries the extended edition of the *Ghostbusters* reboot, despite this edition tipping the banter between the female leads from fun into tedium, rather than adding more of the ghostly action the film could benefit from. The superior theatrical cut is only available on the ordinary Blu-ray (also bundled). Still, who you gonna call?

Aside from this idiotic situation, the 4K BD is a fine example of what the new format can do. Detail levels are excellent despite this being yet another upscale of a 2K master, and there's a beautifully smooth, immersive sheen to the image that leaves the HD Blu-ray looking gritty in comparison.

The addition of HDR adds impressive extra punch and impact to the spectral effects without making them look less realistic; colour refinement imparts every shot with a degree of solidity and realism. A frighteningly good effort.

The Legend of Tarzan

AS ENTERTAINMENT, THIS is a disaster – *The Legend of Tarzan* can't decide if it wants to be a modern update of the Tarzan tale, or stick to a classical approach, its pacing is all over the place, set-pieces are clumsy and too much emphasis is put on SFX that are simply not fit for purpose.

This latter problem is highlighted with grim regularity by the UHD BD presentation. Each CG animal and landscape looks painfully artificial, unfortunate given that there's hardly a real animal or exterior to be seen. Furthermore, the HDR and wide colour grading draws more attention to the film's strange blue/orange-biased

colour scheme, and inconsistencies between different shots. Also, while many shots look smooth and clean, others are fizzy and grainy.

There's a great Atmos mix here, but this is still a disc to avoid.

X-Men: First Class

WITH REGULAR X-MEN director Bryan Singer unavailable, *First Class* fell into the hands of English helmer Matthew Vaughn (*Kingsman*). And the franchise should be glad it did, as this superhero sequel combines a strong plot with Vaughn's trademark visual flair and is possibly the series' best outing.

Sadly, though, this Ultra HD Blu-ray release is a disappointment. The unusually restrained colour palette (by *X-Men* standards) that Vaughn employs doesn't really give the format's dynamism and tonal talents much room to shine, and there's a rather gritty, sometimes quite soft look to the image that doesn't befit the title's big-budget ambitions, and suggests the 2K digital intermediate struck for the movie's cinematic release has been used as the source rather than the original 35mm film elements.

Strangely, given Fox's other recent UHD releases, there's not even a remixed Dolby Atmos soundtrack to keep the uninspiring visuals company.



Beast takes a breather from the mutant mayhem

X-Men: Apocalypse

THE UHD BD of the latest *X-Men* adventure flirts with awesomeness – and is enough to make up for the rather middling nature of the movie itself, which is overladen with characters and sub-plots and often feels like just another rehash of stuff we've already seen before.

Anyway, on to the image quality. Unlike the vast majority of films currently arriving on Ultra HD Blu-ray, this one has been created from an actual, honest-to-goodness 4K digital master put together using a mixture of 6K live action footage and 2K (native) CG effects. The result is images that are among the crispest, cleanest, and most detailed you've seen so far.

It's not just with its genuine 4K resolution that *...Apocalypse* shows off the new disc format's potential, though. HDR adds much more punch to exteriors – especially those in Egypt – as well as a stronger sense of contrast and solidity to interiors. The expanded colour palette, meanwhile, gives the already richly-coloured costumes, settings and special effects real vibrancy.

Everything comes together particularly well in the final climactic battle, which will probably become a staple 4K demo scene.

There are, though, a couple of niggles with *...Apocalypse*'s mostly bleeding-edge visual quality. The main one is that the original 2K resolution of the CGI sometimes stands out like a sore thumb.

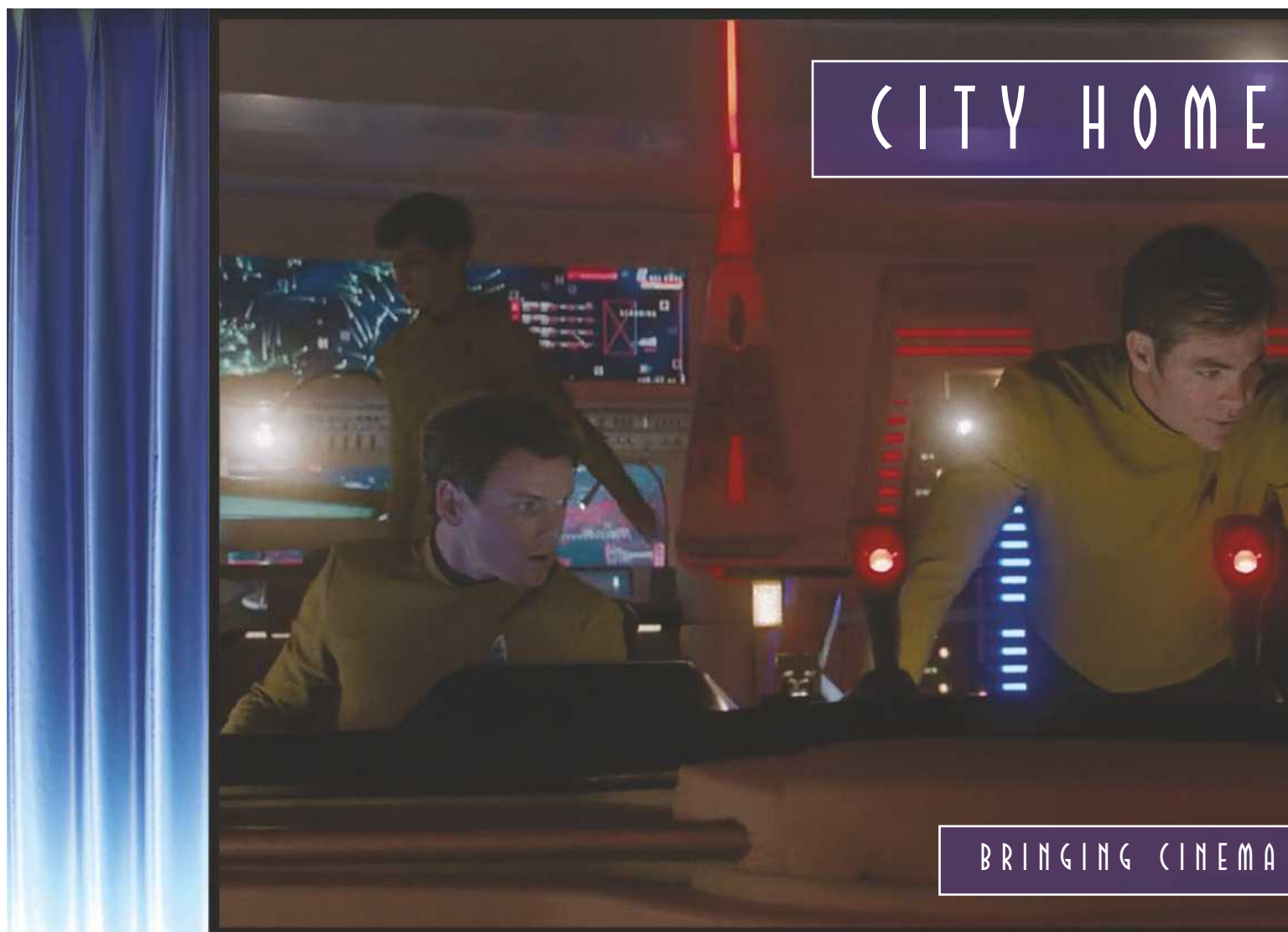
The scene where Cyclops destroys a tree in Xavier's garden, for instance, ends up looking pretty awkward thanks to the clearly reduced resolution of the digitally-added timber.

The other issue with the transfer's exceptional detailing is that it can sometimes leave costumes looking artificial; more like mere props than the real outfits they're supposed to be. Though this is perhaps being picky.

The bloated action is accompanied by a potent, well-mixed and highly immersive Dolby Atmos soundtrack (rather than the DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix that features on the 1080p Blu-ray). It's one of the best I've heard at creating an accurate sense of scale, even during truly huge-scale set-pieces like the final fight.

Chuck in an extensive, illuminating selection of extra features (found on the standard Blu-ray) and *X-Men Apocalypse* adds up to a great advert for the UHD BD format that could just have done with being built around a better-quality film. But you can't have everything ■





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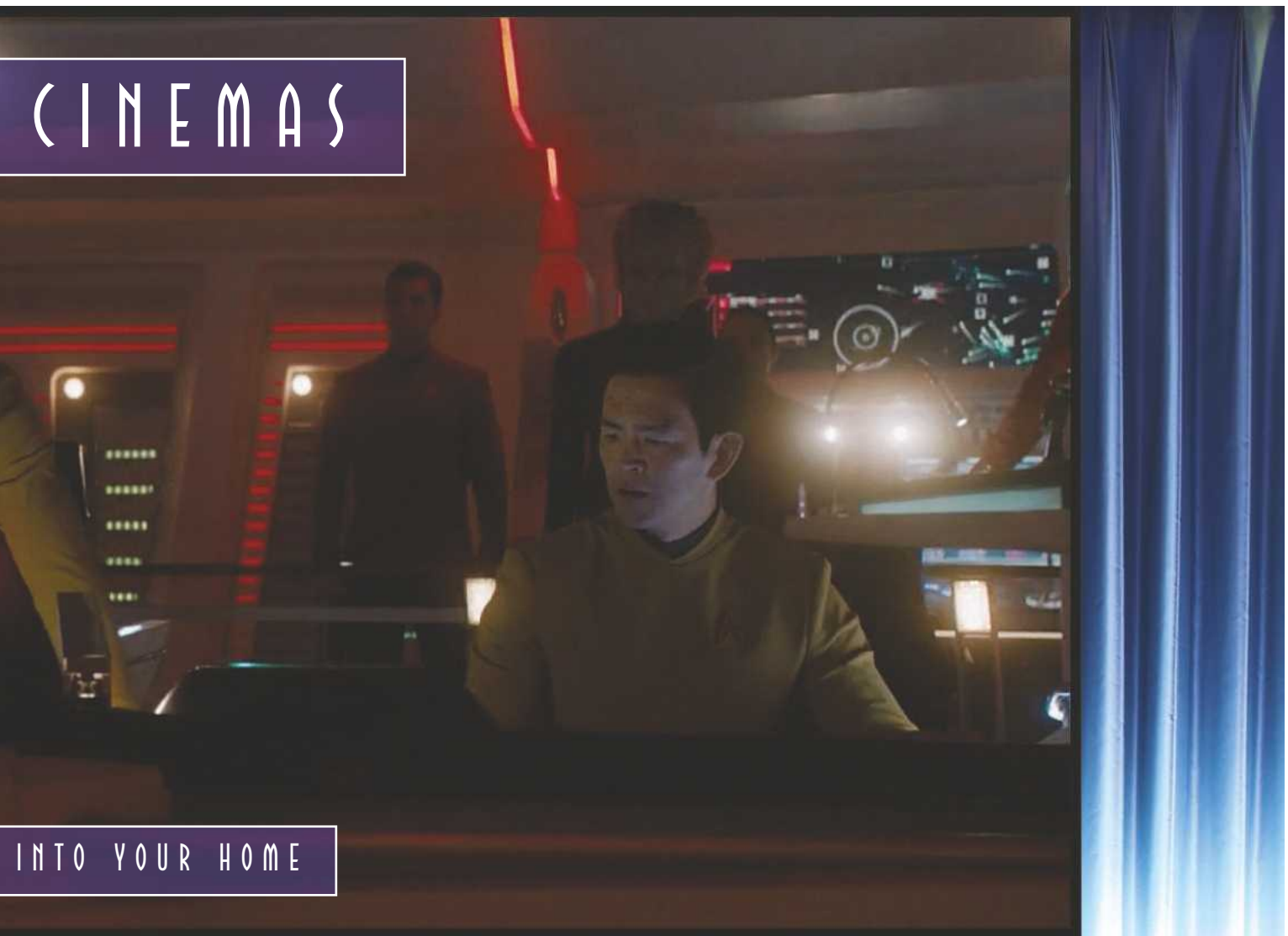
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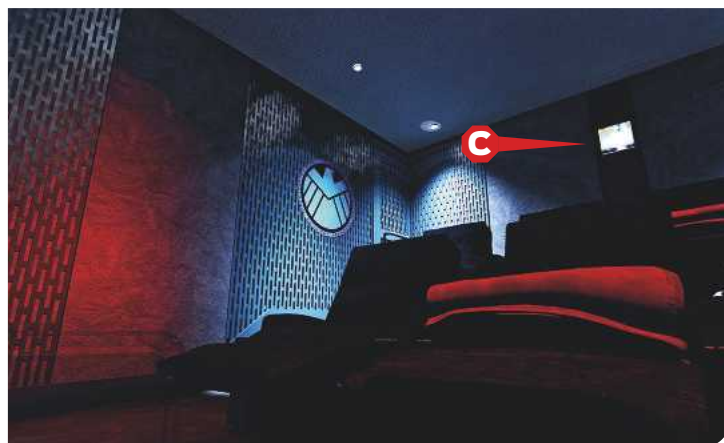
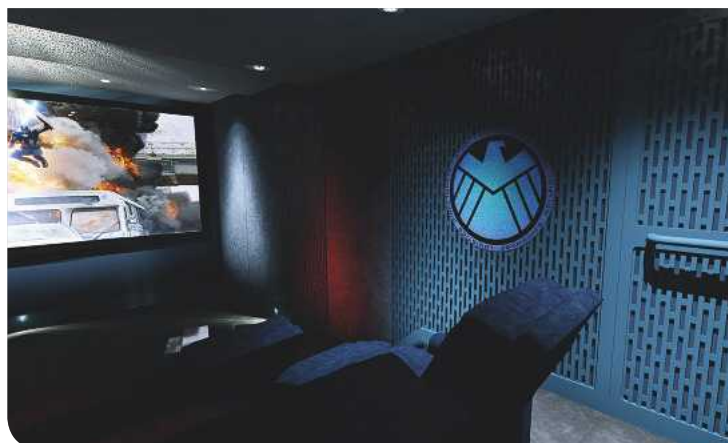
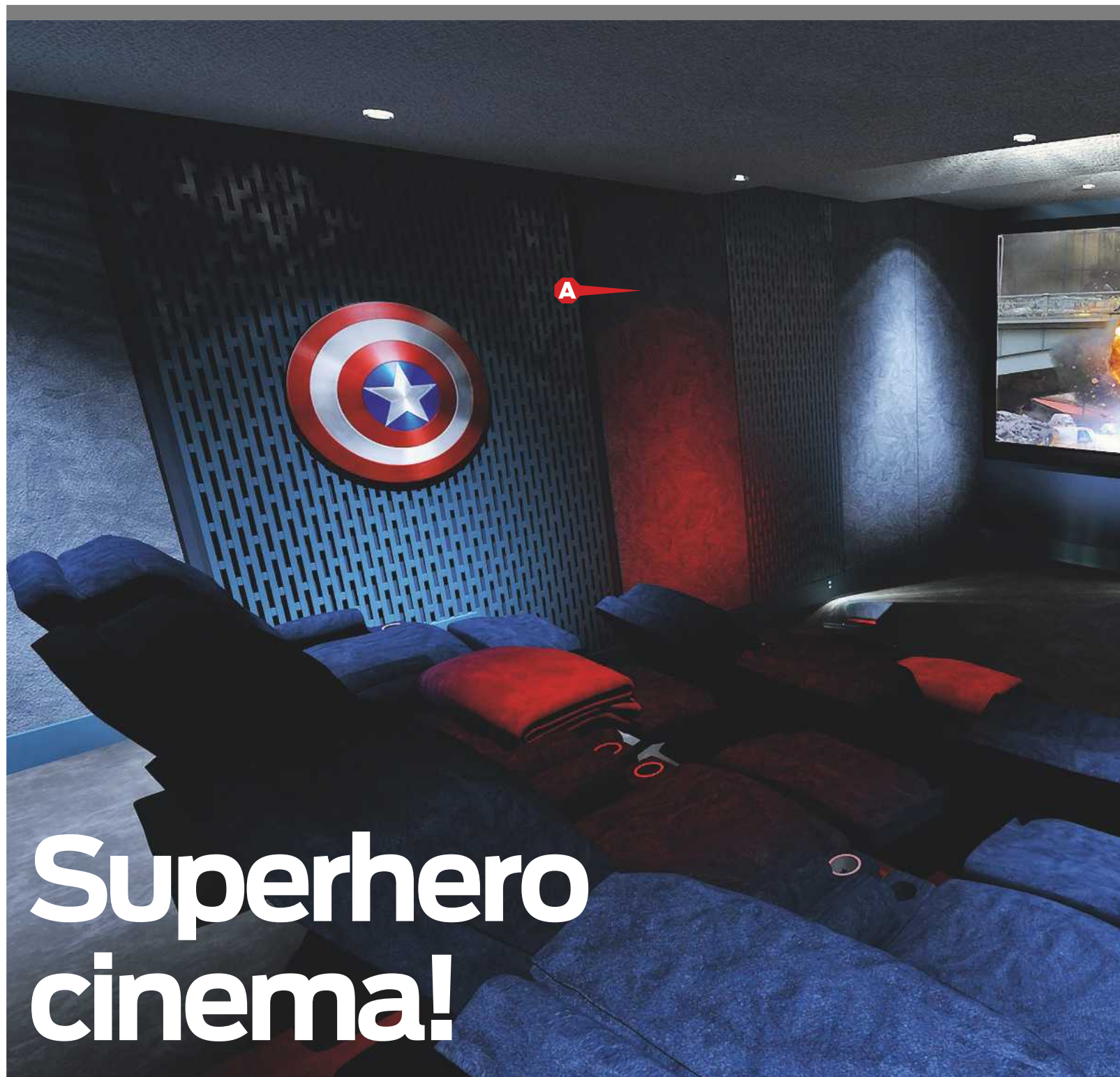
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Themed rooms give you a chance to wear your movie heart on your sleeve. **Mark Craven** reports on a theatre where Marvel rules

SOME GO FOR the bridge of the Enterprise. Others want their personal Batcave. The owner of this luxury cinema room, however, demanded a space fit for Captain America, Iron Man and Nick Fury. Award-winning UK installer Imagine This has surely delivered the goods.

Cap's shield adorns one wall (admittedly not made from Vibranium), while the S.H.I.E.L.D. logo also features. Red accent lighting blends with the blue colour scheme to let visitors know the Avengers are firm favourites.

This eye-catching design is matched by some superheroic hardware. The speaker array, using models from Bowers & Wilkins' install-friendly CT and CCM ranges, caters for the current trio of 3D sound formats, delivered by a potent Trinnov Altitude³² processor and a phalanx of Classe power amplifiers. Backing up the sonics is a high-end, pro-grade Digital Cinema projector from Barco to fire pristine visuals at a 3.5m-wide Screen Research 2.35:1 ratio screen. Rounding out the reference-grade room is integrated system/lighting control via Crestron hardware and movies on tap through a Kaleidescape Strato player and disc vault.

Let's take a guess at the first film watched... ■

A. Heard but not seen

All of the speakers are in-wall or in-ceiling models, including the quartet of subwoofers, height speakers and Auro-3D 'Voice of God' channel

B. Eyes wide open

A 3.5m Screen Research screen is the room's focal point, with the owner opting for a 2.35:1 ratio perfectly suited to CinemaScope flicks

C. Pro's choice

Firing into the cinema from the adjacent plant room is a three-chip DLP Barco Digital Cinema projector, rated at 6,000 Lumens

D. Finishing touch

Recognise that logo? Then Nick Fury may just have a job for you...

KIT CHECKLIST

TRINNOV: Altitude³² processor (Dolby Atmos; DTS:X, Auro-3D compatible)

BOWERS & WILKINS: 5 x CCM8.5 in-ceiling speakers; 4 x CT SW12 12in passive subwoofers; 13 x CT8.4 LCR speakers; 2 x SA1000 subwoofer amplifiers

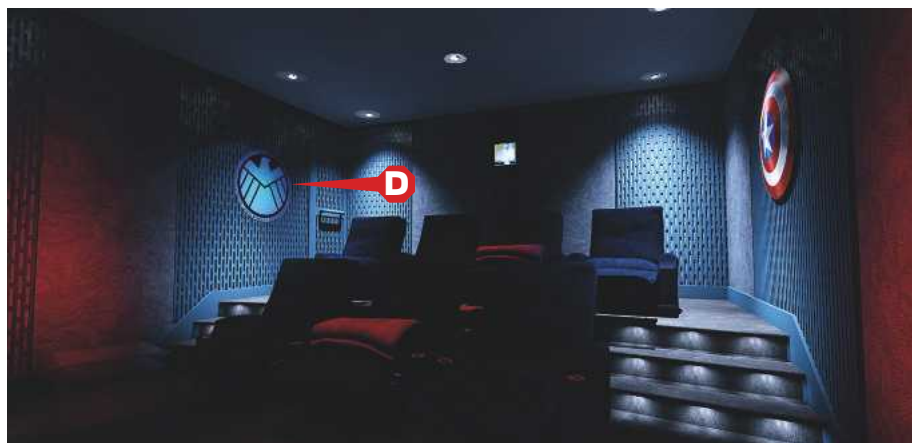
CLASSE: 4 x Sigma-AMP5 five-channel power amplifiers (200W per channel)

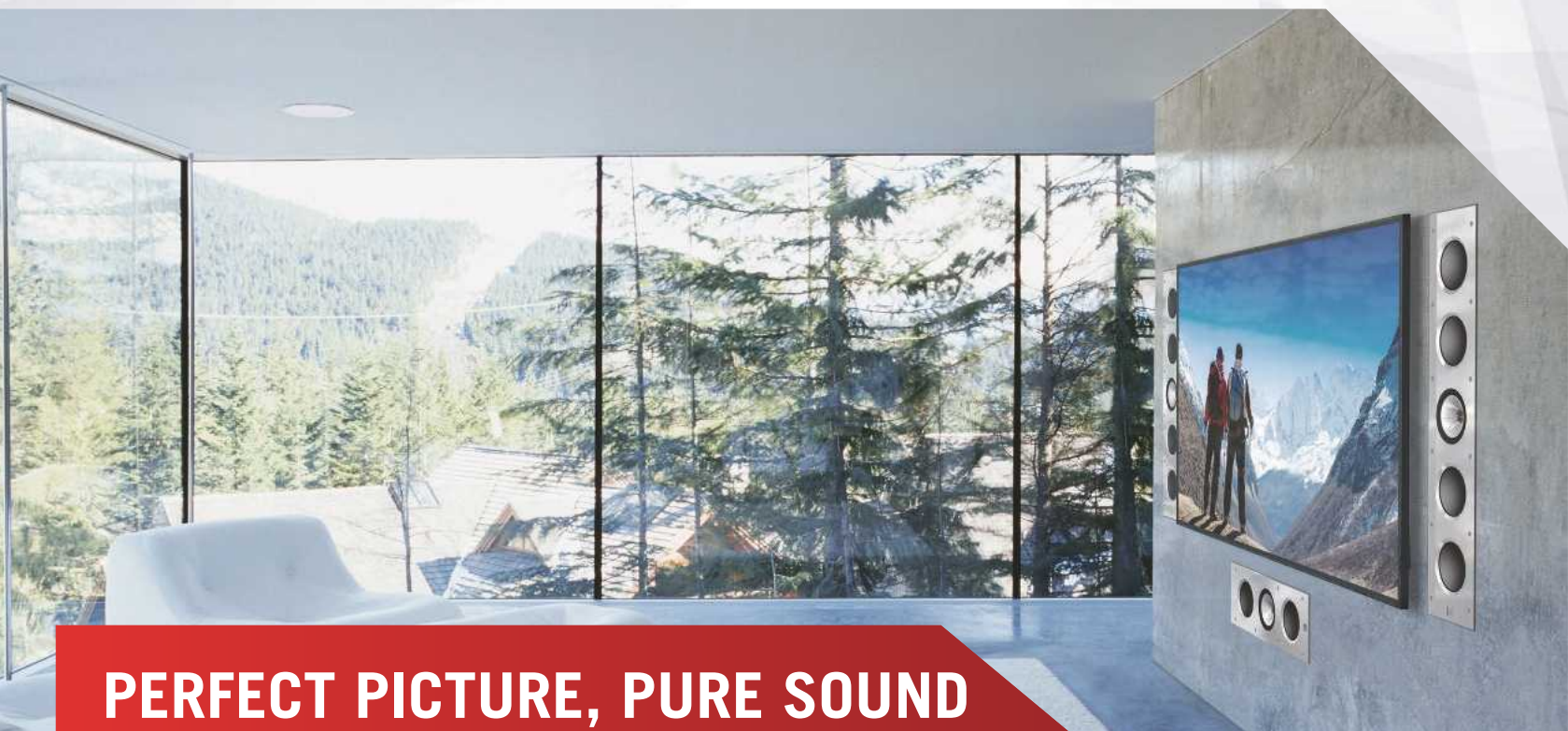
BARCO: DP2K-8S Digital Cinema projector with Alchemy integrated processor

SCREEN RESEARCH: 3.5m 2.35:1 ratio fixed-frame projector screen

KALEIDESCAPE: Strato (4K) movie player; DV700 disc vault

CRESTRON: CP3 automated system control processor





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 AMAZON Echo smart Bluetooth speaker PANASONIC Multiroom audio ecosystem & MORE!

Master of the dark arts



Denon's AVR-X4300H shows its spine-tingling thrills with Dolby Atmos and DTS:X – see p44

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

65in 4K (and 3D)
Android TV with
direct LED lighting

POSITION:

Sony's flagship 65in
TV for 2016

PEERS:

Samsung
UE65KS9500;
LG OLED65E6

The 65ZD9 is an HDR hero and a prime contender for best TV of the year, says **John Archer**

Sony enters Z heaven

Much as I love HDR, it's proving a tough nut for TVs to crack. Not a single model I've seen this year has been able to cope with every part of HDR's extreme demands. The Z-Series Sony 65ZD9 under scrutiny here, though, gets closer than any of its rivals to solving the HDR conundrum. The brand must be kicking itself that it didn't manage to launch it earlier in the year when rival sets were stealing the limelight.

The TV sits right at the top of Sony's current range (there are, though, larger models available, including a 100in beast for those with a spare £60,000). So, how does Sony denote that top-flight status? By introducing a new aesthetic that sees its bezel flaunting a gold trim. It's certainly eye-catching, although the chunky feeling of the TV (aided by the angled stand) might not be to everyone's taste. And the black plastic rear panel that is used to hide the connection ports feels particularly cheap for a £4,000 model.

The TV doesn't offer anything 'out there' on the connections front. You get the four HDMI's, three USBs and network hookups you'd expect on any 2016 flagship. But what's special about the 65ZD9 is what's on the inside.

For starters it uses a direct LED lighting system (where the lights are placed directly behind the screen). Even better, every one of the more than 600 LEDs that illuminate the TV's pictures can have its light controlled independently of its neighbours. This sort of local light control is in high demand, now that TVs have got HDR's expanded light range to deal with.

That's not the end of the 65ZD9's light management either. Sony says it employs 'focused beam' technology to enable groups of LEDs to combine their light for especially intense parts of the picture, while the brand's X-Tended Dynamic Range processing is on hand to redirect power from dark areas of the picture to bright ones.

Now, even the ZD9's backlight control doesn't get close to the pixel-by-pixel approach that is offered by OLED displays. Countering this, however, is OLED's current maximum brightness of around 700 nits, which doesn't get near the phenomenal 1,800 nits the 65ZD9 is suggested to achieve. And while black levels of the sort that OLED excels at are undoubtedly a key factor in a convincing picture, so is the sort of brightness the 65ZD9 can give.

Away from its backlight tech, the 65ZD9 carries Sony's Triluminos technology, which helps it deliver more than 90 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour space (although my colleague Jon Thompson says you shouldn't get too excited by that – see p78). And to get the most from the TV's HDR-friendly hardware, Sony has introduced a new chipset. The X1 Extreme apparently packs 40 per cent more horsepower than chips used elsewhere in the company's range. It also upgrades 8-bit and 10-bit sources up to '14-bit equivalent gradation' to remove colour striping, while new processing systems add object- and depth-recognition elements to boost upscaling of HD and SD sources.

If there's a bum note in the 65ZD9's fearsome specifications it's the use of Android TV as its main smart platform. If you ask me, a set that promises a luxury experience deserves something better. I still find Android the most sluggish, buggy, overbearing and unfocused of all the current interfaces. The TV does, though, support the straightforward YouView catch-up TV platform, and offers HDR and 4K-capable versions of the Netflix and Amazon video streaming apps.

Bright star

The 65ZD9's backlight innovations have all been developed with a focus on HDR – and in this regard they pay off mind-blowingly well.

The first thing that hits you is the picture's incredible brightness. Bright scenes in Ultra HD Blu-ray titles radiate with an intensity I've never seen on a domestic screen before. This, in turn, makes you more aware of just how much impact the bright end of HDR's expanded luminance range can have.

As an example, when viewed on the 65ZD9, the shoot-out on the bridge in *Deadpool* appears wonderfully vivid, natural and three-dimensional, with the only downside

1. The remote has hot-keys for Netflix and GoogleCast

2. The 65ZD9 employs Sony's new X1 Extreme chipset



CAPTAIN SLOG

Kirk and pals keep going in *Star Trek Beyond* on Blu-ray p98





3

being that switching back to standard dynamic range content feels even more of a drag than it does with other HDR displays.

What's especially noteworthy about the 65ZD9's brightness, though, is the way it doesn't have any real negative effect on darker parts of the picture. For instance,

'The first thing that hits you is the incredible brightness. Bright scenes in UHD BDs radiate with intensity'

there's no trace of bright elements in predominantly dark shots – such as the owl that flies around the opening credits of *Labyrinth* – having their brightness reduced to help the TV boost its black level performance. Nor are black areas as prone to being invaded by light pollution from bright elements as they are with rival models.

Labyrinth's opening-credits owl again provides a great example of this latter strength. The amount of grey light

haloing around the bird is much more subtle and restrained than it is with any other LED TV I've seen. With Samsung's KS9500 TV, for instance [see HCC #265], the extent of light pollution around the owl isn't very intense but spreads over quite a large area. With Panasonic's DX902 [see HCC #259], the haloing spread is fairly limited but looks brighter. On the 65ZD9, light pollution is limited in terms of both the screen real estate it affects and the intensity with which it appears. The result is that it's much less likely to distract.

Black colours ring deep and true, while still delivering plenty of subtle shading and colour information. This is the icing on the contrast cake that home cinema fans will cherish. There's an extreme quality to the Sony's HDR picture, but it's ruthlessly controlled.

Chewing over colour with Peanuts...

Colour handling doesn't disappoint either. With everything from the gorgeous cartoon palette of *The Peanuts Movie* on Ultra HD Blu-ray to the HDR- and wide colour gamut-enhanced tones of *Forza Horizon 3*'s cars on the Xbox One S console, this 65-incher pumps out

4



colours as bold, rich and riveting as you'll expect, with finessed blends that encourage close inspection. And the TV's innate brightness comes into play here, too, helping it reach the necessary colour 'volume' a true HDR experience requires.

Switching to non-HDR 4K content in the shape of a couple of live UHD Premier League football matches and downloaded documentaries via Sky Q (I'm a big fan of *Big Cats*), is a disappointment to the extent that you no longer benefit from the 65ZD9's maximum potential. However, compared more fairly with other TVs running 4K in standard dynamic range mode, the Sony continues to be utterly beguiling. Colours retain their rich feel and nuances, and the contrast range still appears more extreme than you might expect from an SDR performance.

Ultra HD image sharpness is striking. You can, for instance, see details of all those Premier League footballer tattoos during UHD broadcasts that escape the eye with lesser 4K TVs. Happy days! And all that 4K finery simply extends the sense of immersion you get from a screen this big.

UHD football broadcasts confirm that the 65ZD9 follows in the footsteps of other recent Sony sets by benefitting from arguably the best motion handling in the current TV world. Even without using the available motion processing, players jink across the screen without suffering much judder or resolution loss. And you can remove such issues entirely if you use one of the 65ZD9's relatively low-powered frame trickery systems without the picture suffering significantly with distracting artefacts.

The 65ZD9's talents don't stop at 4K. Sony's 4K TVs have always been good at upscaling HD, but the new chipset employed here appears to be fine-tuning the process even further. A run through of the new *Ghostbusters* reboot on Blu-ray finds the upscaled picture combining a sense of extra detail with refined colour subtlety and image depth. It also does a remarkably sure-footed job of processing out any noise a sub-4K source might contain. Scenes like the team's first ghostly encounter in the old mansion actually look cleaner on the 65ZD9 than they do on my reference Full HD TV (a Pioneer Kuro, if you must know).



SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 resolution **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10 **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD (plus YouView catchup); satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; Ethernet port; headphone jack; subwoofer line out; analogue audio inputs; optical digital audio output **SOUND:** 20W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,800 nits peak **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,462(w) x 847(h) x 78(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 32kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; DLNA network streaming; Backlight Master Drive technology; X1 Extreme chipset; Android TV platform; Motionflow XR; Bluetooth connectivity; GoogleCast; HDCP 2.2

PARTNER WITH



SONY HT-NT5: Capable of hi-res audio playback and sharing the same angled design as Sony's TV, the £450 HT-NT5 soundbar will offer an immediate audio boost. A 2.1-design, it offers 4K-capable HDMI inputs and app control/streaming.

3D Jaeger bomb? Not quite

Unlike a growing number of rival TVs, and sure to cheer up my editor (see p75), the 65ZD9 supports 3D playback. In fact, it even ships with two pairs of active shutter glasses. Unfortunately, though, its 3D pictures aren't as convincing as its 2D efforts. They look richly coloured and enjoy a good sense of depth thanks to the TV's excellent contrast, but there's some pretty pronounced crosstalk ghosting noise around, for instance, the lights of *Pacific Rim*'s shatterdome, and the Jaeger pilot's white 'armour'. And, as an aside, it's also hard to accept the rather dark look of 3D images once you've basked in the glories of the TV's explosive HDR pictures. But the important thing is that this set will work with stereoscopic sources.

Now things have taken a negative turn, I should add that the 65ZD9 only operates well within a fairly limited viewing angle; watch from more than 30 degrees – maybe even a little less – and the previously well-controlled light haloing suddenly becomes much more noticeable. An OLED TV is a better bet in this situation.

I also measured 40ms of input lag, which is a touch higher than I'd ideally like, and the set's audio is slightly underwhelming by today's standards. There just isn't enough bass grunt to underpin and round out action scenes like *Pacific Rim*'s epic Kaiju/Jaeger battles. It'll leave you hankering for former Sony sets that carried imperious full-size drivers. You can always add an external sound system (or a sub via the line-out socket), of course.

When it comes to scoring the 65ZD9, I'm not going to let a less-than-stellar 3D performance over-ride my feelings. Nor can the TV's lack of Dolby Vision support count against it, as that is a format that's yet to make waves. These are molehills against the mountains of unprecedented picture glory that Sony's new masterpiece delivers with pretty much any 2D source you care to throw at it. Superb ■

3. Sony's double-barrel bezel enjoys a touch of golden bling

4. Keeping this 32kg, 65in set steady is a centralised stand that makes furniture matching simple

HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-65ZD9

→ £4,000 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: The 65ZD9 delivers hands down the best HDR picture quality I've ever seen, and it's no slouch with SDR either. Not cheap, but it's worth it.

Dolby Atmos and DTS:X? Multiroom streaming? Hi-res audio? Welcome to the future of AV, says **Steve May**

So good it's almost scary





Denon has always been quick out of the gate with AV niceties. The brand has a tendency to lead the way when it comes to codecs, and that's certainly the case here. The nine-channel AVR-X4300H features Dolby Atmos and DTS:X decoding, with an option (£149) to upgrade to Auro-3D early 2017. If you're looking for a full slate of 3D systems, you've come to the right place.

But there's much more to the AVR-X4300H than 360-degree surround sound, as that suffix denotes. H is for HEOS, Denon's wireless multiroom audio platform. This is the first time we've seen native support for HEOS built in to an AV receiver, and it rocks. Before now, owners had to go through the faff of adding an outboard HEOS pre-amp to achieve the same. For those intrigued at the possibility of integrating whole-home audio with a cinema system, HEOS could be a killer app.

Design and connectivity are first-class. The X4300H is reasonably hefty, with a copper-plated chassis and mono-block construction. There are seven rear HDMI inputs, plus one behind a front-fascia drawbridge, and all support HDCP 2.2 devices with 4K/60Hz passthrough. You're unlikely to run out of UHD ingress anytime soon.

Helpfully, there are also three HDMI outputs. A typical user case might see both a TV and projector fed in a main cinema room, with the third HDMI devoted to Zone 2.

In addition to HDMI, there're composite and component inputs, four digital audio inputs, six analogue stereo pairs, MM phono support, Ethernet and a front USB port.

The receiver will upscale all analogue sources to the HDMI output, and interpolate low-res sources to 2,160p resolution. Basically, this means you can give your Wii U a pixel bump and make the most of non-4K OTT sources. 4:4:4 colour sub-sampling is supported as standard.

Unfortunately, there's no multichannel analogue audio input here, which would have been nice for owners of older hi-res DVD-A/SACD disc-spinners.

Owners of Denon's DBT-3313UD Blu-ray player can also take advantage of the Denon Link HD coaxial link to reduce jitter (an evolution of the original Denon Link).

The AVR is 'net-savvy, of course, and getting online is quick and efficient. The receiver supports dual-band Wi-Fi, plus Bluetooth. Of less immediate interest to everyday cinephiles are native connectivity to a Crestron control system, plus RS232 and dual 12V triggers.

The whole nine yards

Denon rates power output at 9 x 200W (into 6 Ohms), and there's demonstrably decent grunt onboard. While this is a nine-channel design, allowing 7.1.2 or 5.1.4 speaker layouts, there's also processing (and pre-outs) for 11.2 (but not the front-wide 13.2 flavour) if you want to add extra amplification, either now or in the future. The receiver is claimed to partner loudspeakers down to 4 Ohms.

Of course, hefty power can mean a significant suck on the mains. To mitigate against that there's an Intelligent Eco mode. Now, to be honest, I'd rather have my amplification unfettered, but for more frugal film fans there are two Eco options, Always On and Auto. The latter is the more sensible choice as it only applies Eco settings when the volume is low. Leave it running in the former mode, though, and you risk unwanted distortion.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Nine-channel object-audio AV receiver

POSITION:

Denon's newest nine-channel model, below the 11-channel AVR-X6300H

PEERS:

Onkyo TX-RZ1100; Pioneer SC-LX801

1. A front flap hides USB and HDMI inputs, plus control buttons

2. The handset offers quick access to the amp's Eco setting





3

This Eco setting is deemed important enough to warrant a place on the remote control. An onscreen visual also lets you see how much juice you're saving. If you're that bothered, you probably shouldn't be buying an AVR.

The DSP engine comprises a quartet of fourth-gen SHARC processors, which the brand says equates to 10 GFLOPS of processing capacity. That's way more than the whole of NASA had for the moon landing back in 1969, so should suffice for weekly outings of *Flash* and *Arrow*.

Denon has increased Audio Delay scope to 500ms. Getting correct lip sync seems to be becoming more of an issue of late – I'm running 120ms on a different Denon/4K TV combi at present – so this latitude could prove useful.

Glamorous assistant

I've a lot of time for Denon's Setup Assistant. Using artful doodles, it's a relatively quick way to connect and configure the receiver. Speaker calibration comes via long-standing partner Audyssey. Here the implementation is the high-spec MultEQ XT32 iteration. You can measure up to eight seating positions, using SubEQ to tighten up paired subs. Be wary of the LFC (Low Frequency Containment) mode, though, which uses psychoacoustics to contain deep bass.

There's also Dynamic Volume and Dynamic EQ. The former helps alleviate unwanted jumps in volume (I need that to calm VirginMedia's TiVo box), while the latter aims to retain dynamics even at low levels.

Included in the box is the usual cardboard setup mic stand. Accurately placing the microphone at ear height can make a significant difference to Audyssey calculations, so take advantage of this for greater accuracy. The system also supports the €20 Audyssey calibration app, now due for release early 2017. This promises a great deal of additional refinement, including mid-range compensation control, a curve editor and adjustable roll-off. It remains to

be seen just how effective these toys are, but we look forward to it finally arriving and having a play.

To reinforce the X4300H's HEOS interoperability, the receiver currently comes with a free HEOS 1 HS2 (worth £200). This neat compact network/Bluetooth speaker is ideally suited for small rooms and takes just a few minutes to set up. Once you've downloaded the HEOS app, you'll be streaming music services from your smartphone – Spotify, Tidal, SoundCloud, TuneIn and more, directly from the HEOS app – or sharing content twixt AVR and speaker.

'Surround sound imaging and transient delivery are excellent – this has a knack for speed and precision'

Having HEOS onboard is quite a hoot. Play a CD on your Blu-ray deck, select that input as the source on the AVR through the HEOS app, and you can Party Zone the music through both

your cinema system and the diddy HEOS 1 simultaneously. Similarly, you can also share movie soundtracks, although Dolby/DTS bitstreams play out-of-sync with connected HEOS speakers.

For much of this audition, I ran the AVR-X4300H in a 7.1.2 configuration. If, however, you're not looking for immersive 3D cinematics, you can use untapped amplification for a second zone. Alternatively, there are pre-amp outputs for second and third rooms.

This AVR obviously has the wherewithal to be properly seismic, but Dolby Atmos isn't just about blowing the roof off your room, it can raise the dead too. High-class chiller *The Conjuring 2* (Blu-ray) offers a marvellously Atmospheric listening experience, with an unsettling score that sells the benefits of 3D mixing.

When the hapless coppers come to check out the otherworldly disturbances in Enfield, the Denon renders



the discordant strings in the soundtrack with relish and body. And despite the cacophony, the receiver never sounds screechy or overwrought.

Composer Joseph Bishara likes to play the creepy choir card hard and often, which adds a portentous, ethereal element to the mix. Steered around and through Dolby-enabled speakers, the realism of the soundstage becomes deeply scary. This kind of sonic performance is great theatre. When the Crooked Man rhyme moves from child to adult voices, the Denon sent tingles up my spine.

Multichannel imaging and transient delivery are excellent – the AVR-X4300H showcases a knack for speed and precision. As ghostbuster Ed Warren (Patrick Wilson) tries to persuade the spectre of Bill Wilkins to come forth and talk (Chapter 8), there's a disconcerting ripple of creaks and groans around the room. Rain pitter-patters in the Atmos channel, before what sounds like heavy footsteps thump on floorboards one floor up – height

4



SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes. **DTS:X:** Yes. **THX:** No. **POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 9 x 200W (into six Ohms) **HDMI:** 8 x inputs; 3 x outputs. **AV INPUTS:** 4 x digital audio (2 x optical, 2 x coaxial); 4 x composite video; 2 x component video. **ANALOGUE MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No. **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT:** Yes. 11.2 pre-outs. **MULTIROOM:** Yes. Zones 2 & 3. **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes. To 4K. **DIMENSIONS:** 434(w) x 389(d) x 167(h)mm. **WEIGHT:** 13.5kg.

FEATURES: HEOS multiroom support; ISF video calibration; iOS/Android apps; Audyssey MultEQ XT32 room EQ; future Audyssey app; Denon Link HD; Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB; FM tuner; dual subwoofer output; Auro-3D upgrade path; Bluetooth; 2 x 12V triggers; RS232; Crestron Connected; HDCP 2.2; audio file playback incl. DSD.

PARTNER WITH



DENON DBT-3313UD: While we wait for Denon to cook up a 4K BD player, this remains its disc-playing diva. A £550 'universal' design, it works admirably as movie and music machine, and offers 'Link HD' jitter reduction hookup to the AVR-X4300H.

channels work particularly well on haunted house movies, it seems. Objects shunt around unexpectedly, before Bill makes his guttural introduction. I squeaked in appreciation.

The X4300H is clean and transparent, perhaps more than you might expect from a Denon AVR – in the past they've veered towards richness and warmth. This gives the receiver a crisp smoothness that's particularly effective with electronica and jazz. Of course, such nuances are largely lost with most movie soundtracks.

When you've exhausted your supply of Atmos or DTS:X material, use the DTS Neural:X upmixer to expand the soundfield and get extra mileage from your height speakers. This post-processing mode does a stunning job with *Battlefield 1* (PS4), adding an extra layer of sonic mayhem. I reckon it should be a default mode for gamers.

Or use Dolby Surround – the upmixed 7.1 soundtrack of *The Walking Dead* benefits from eerie ambience and space during sequences set in the wild. Walkers really do appear to be slathering over and above your shoulder.

Of course, this engorged soundfield doesn't always chill. The DTS:X soundmix on *The Huntsman: Winter's War* proves immersive in subtle ways too, while demonstrating the Denon's assured approach to LFE. When Hemsworth enters the forest (Chapter 6), you sense the walls of the listening room lift, creating a realistically open space.

As for hi-res music, file support is generally excellent, with the X4300H even unspooling DSD in both 2.8MHz and 5.6MHz flavours. It'll also refresh MP3s and WMAs through its Compressed Audio Restorer function. But really, why slum it?

Basically, when it comes to top-notch functionality, the AVR-X4300H takes some beating, and HEOS integration is a brilliant idea. Clean, balanced, powerful and immersive sound too. I love it ■

3. Matching cable labels are provided for Denon's colour-coded speaker terminals

4. Buy from an authorised dealer and – for the next couple of months – you'll get a free HEOS 1 HS2

HCC VERDICT



Denon AVR-X4300H

→ £1,300 → www.denon.co.uk

WE SAY: This exciting nine-channel behemoth is a 3D audio thriller, and the integration of HEOS multiroom support provides welcome frosting. Sweet.

Audio whizz ATC develops a new centre speaker, giving **Ed Selley** a great excuse to get in a whole set

A touch of class from the pros

1. The SCM7s are all supplied with robust, magnetically-affixing grilles



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1 standmount
speaker system

POSITION:
The SCM range
is ATC's entry-
level offering

PEERS:
Spendor S3/5R2 5.1
PMC Twenty.22 5.1

Some speaker brands make a point of releasing and updating products on a regular basis while others unveil new equipment roughly as often as we are visited by comets. ATC is firmly at the celestial visitor end of this equation so a new speaker is big news.

The new model in question is the C1C centre. ATC has centre speakers in its range already, but the C1C has been developed to partner the company's well-regarded SCM lineup – specifically the 7 and 11 standmount models. To ensure a good tonal match, the C1C uses a pair of the same 5in midbass drivers that reside in the SCM7

standmount, partnered with the company's 1in soft dome tweeter that's used across the whole SCM range. All drivers are made by ATC and exude a ruggedness that suggests they'll take anything you throw at them.

As it has been designed with a view to working with the SCM7, we've selected that speaker for front and rear channel duties (there are SCM floorstanders, too). These two-way standmounts are the smallest stereo model that the company manufactures, and as ATC does not use bass ports in the SCM range, it means that while they have an extremely even performance across their frequency response and seem unfussy about placement, they bottom out at 60Hz, which is pretty high even by the standards of a speaker of this size.

This is where the C1 Sub subwoofer comes into play. Once again designed to compliment the smaller members of the SCM family, this is also a sealed box design. But given that the cabinet contains one of the burliest-looking 12in drivers I've seen in anything that wasn't being gigged by The Grateful Dead, the absence of a port or bonus passive radiator shouldn't be too much of an issue. Power is provided by a 200W class AB amp (rather than the more typical Class D), built in-house by ATC.

While the C1 Sub is pretty hefty (24kg), it's also rather clever. All the controls are accessible by jog dial and supplied remote, and set via a front-panel display (which can be dimmed and switched off). This is instead of peering around the rear panel trying to read switches upside down, which is always welcome.

In fact, the package as a whole manages to balance functional brutality and elegance rather well. ATC is still very active in pro audio but this hasn't prevented it from veneering everything to a superbly high standard, and the result is a set of speakers that should sit in most lounges without jarring sensibilities. The cherry finish of our review samples is attractive but more modern black ash and white finishes are also available. Of course, you can't take all the pro essence out of the mix and the metal cage grilles might attract a few curious looks. But they are at least almost completely childproof, and as they affix magnetically, they don't leave any unsightly holes when not attached.

As the entire suite of speakers uses sealed enclosures, this is not a terribly hard set to accommodate. The SCM7 does its best work on stands but is unfazed by proximity to walls, while the C1C is completely content on a sturdy shelf. The ATCs have fairly benign impedance behaviour but do benefit from plenty of power and they will cheerfully show up the limitations of your electronics.

Virtuous performance

For that reason, I have not always been the most ardent fan of ATC speakers, wary of their slight ruthlessness and a controlled but slightly limited bass response. In this context though, neither of these detriments is as much of an issue and the virtues of the ATCs begin to make themselves felt.

For starters, this is a supremely revealing set of speakers. With *Big Hero 6*, the film's giant waves of microbots are a treasure trove of individual detail. The ATCs capture the sense that onscreen is a mass of millions of individual units and not a single object. They then have capacity in reserve to move dialogue and the frantic whine of an escaping minivan around the room with pin-point precision. These are speakers that seem to take it as a



point of honour that no detail of the soundtrack, however trivial, is to be omitted. This makes the C1C a joy for dialogue. If you are supposed to be able to understand what someone is saying on screen, this is a speaker that will ensure you do.

With identical drivers across the SCM7 and C1C, handover between the enclosures is extremely good, as you might expect. Even judged by demanding standards though, the C1C is an astonishingly close match to the standmount, and the result is an exceptionally smooth and well-integrated front soundstage.

There's a gorgeously uniform tonality from the whole array, too. With the final rendition of jazz torture test *Caravan* in *Whiplash*, the ATCs prove absolutely

'The addition of the C1C centre introduces ATC's SCM7s to the home cinema world. That's a good thing..'

outstanding. The band is a visceral presence in the room with tangible presence and scale, and the tone of the brass section is so fundamentally right it leaves most rivals looking somewhat half-hearted by comparison.

With a Yamaha RX-A3040 as the back end, this SCM7 package goes effortlessly loud. The climactic storm drain sequence in *Into the Storm* is an absolute cacophony of wind, water, debris and senseless dialogue. The ATCs deliver it with a genuine sense of pressure in the room, but never harden up or sound strained. It's the kind of refined sound that you might expect from a brand with a musical bent, but don't confuse that with a lack of excitement. That same sumptuous detail retrieval and effects positioning never wavers.

Once you've finished thrashing them, you can drop the volume, return to watching something innocuous on Netflix and the ATCs will uncomplainingly deliver the goods. A lower level doesn't equate to less sonic assurance. The supreme clarity with dialogue and all-round tonal accuracy remain, making viewing a continual pleasure.

Amongst all this relentless positivity, what little can be said against the ATCs mainly concerns the subwoofer. Compared to the outstandingly capable speakers, the

SPECIFICATIONS

SCM7

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in doped cone midbass driver; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 60Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 84dB **POWER HANDLING:** 300W
DIMENSIONS: 174(w) x 300(h) x 215(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.5kg

C1C

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in doped cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 57Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 86dB **POWER HANDLING:** 300W
DIMENSIONS: 410(w) x 161(h) x 280(d)mm
WEIGHT: 12kg

C1 Sub (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in doped paper woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 18Hz-250Hz **ONBOARD POWER:** 200W
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 360(w) x 410(h) x 360(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono input/LFE input; speaker level inputs

PARTNER WITH



PRIMARE SPA23 4KVM:

Primare has updated its premium SPA23 five-channel AVR (£3,750) to include 4K passthrough via its HDMI stage. This is a useful addition to a receiver that astonishes with its dynamic, accurate presentation.

C1 Sub is not as much of a show-stopper. There's nice integration with the SCM7s, and the effortless detail and cohesion that the speakers possess is matched here, but there are unquestionably rivals at a similar price (£1,300 when bought individually) that can slam a little harder. It does drop remarkably deep, though.

A caveat to this is that a partnership of two SCM7s and C1 Sub makes for a wonderfully revealing and insightful 2.1 system. Listening to a 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC rip of Leftfield's *Bad Radio*, the sub's slight lack of final LF punch is overshadowed by its breathtaking speed and agility. It's a spectacular performance, showcasing real synergy between the standmounts and woofer.

Nice to meet you

The addition of the C1C centre speaker introduces ATC's SCM7s to the home cinema world. On the basis of my experience with this 5.1 array, that's a good thing. This is a set of speakers that's domestically acceptable in terms of size and finish, but carries over enough of the brand's professional audio ethos to ensure you get a sense of what a movie sound engineer wanted you to hear – without embellishment, compromise or oversight. It's not inexpensive (ATC's idea of entry-level is probably different to yours), but when you consider the sheer ability it possesses, it's worth it ■

2. ATC's C1 Sub offers low- and high-level inputs

2



HCC VERDICT



ATC SCM7 5.1

→ £3,250 → www.atcloudspeakers.co.uk

WE SAY: A triumphant multichannel package that combines detail, power and authority. Beautifully built and easy to accommodate. Give it an audition.

R —LINE—

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Danny Phillips reckons Wharfedale could teach Hollywood a thing or two about Special Editions

Compact reboot pays off in 5.1

Anyone who's seen the ridiculous CG song-and-dance routine George Lucas added to *Return of the Jedi* will know that Special Editions aren't always a good idea. The same can be true of AV gear – often an SE revamp involves nothing more than a lick of paint and a mark up.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

5.1-channel compact speaker system

POSITION:

Affordable update of the DX-1 HCP

PEERS:

Polk Audio TL1600; Quad L-ite Plus 5.1

However, with the DX-1SE – a reboot of 2012's DX-1 HCP compact speaker package – Wharfedale is looking to put the 'special' back in Special Edition. It's fine-tuned the drivers and re-engineered the cabinets in an effort to tighten up performance and turn a good speaker system into a great one. That's the idea anyway.

The DX-1SE was born to bring full 5.1 sound into rooms without lots of space to play with. The compact satellites and subwoofer can be easily placed on shelves or furniture, blending in with their surroundings. They take their design cues from Wharfedale's Diamond series, but shrunk down to a more manageable size.

So what's in the box? Four identical front and surround satellites, a dedicated centre speaker and a powered subwoofer. The front/surround sats measure a diddy 190mm tall by 110mm wide, a good 12mm slimmer than the previous design. They're ideally suited to small rooms (and as sealed enclosures can be placed near or on a wall) and unlikely to offend clutter-phobic family members.

Living-room acceptance will be enhanced further by the choice of black or white high-gloss finishes, both gorgeous. The gleaming surfaces of our white samples communicate luxury in a way vinyl veneers never can, and the black grilles form a striking contrast.

The look is cleaner and sharper than the DX-1 HCP. Tapered back ends make way for straight sides and a sheer back panel, which not only increases the internal volume but also gives them a more modern feel.

Solid little rocks

Build quality is every bit as impressive as the original system. Weighty and solidly bolted together, the cabinets certainly feel like they'll stand the test of time. There are sturdy-looking gold-plated binding posts on the back. Only the grilles give the game away – they're held on by plugs not magnets, and the plastic framework feels flimsy.

Liberate those grilles and you'll uncover the sats' fetching front aspect. The drivers are framed by shiny



surrounds studded with screws, while the 3in woven polypropylene mid/bass cones have a smart, dappled texture.

The front and surround satellites use a single version of this driver and a 0.75in silk dome tweeter, but the horizontal centre speaker uses two mid/bass units that flank the tweeter. The centre also employs an aperiodic loading system – in other words, a vent filled with a porous foam plug to control airflow and aid bass response.

The WH-D8 subwoofer is styled to match and is a compact, cube design. Measuring just 328mm high, it'll snuggle happily beside a TV stand or sofa without getting in the way. A manual inspection reveals a slight dip in build quality, with gloss only used on the front panel (the rest employs a matt finish) but overall it feels a well-made sub for the money – this whole shebang costs a mere £400.

The sub's 8in long-throw woofer and 120W onboard amp don't conjure images of chandelier-rattling bass

1. The DX-1 satellites are even more compact than before



but it should be adequate for the size of space Wharfedale has in mind. On the back panel are controls for volume, crossover frequency, phase and auto power, plus stereo/LFE phono inputs.

Clunk, click, every trip

I sent the DX-ISE into battle with the *Mad Max: Fury Road* TrueHD soundmix and although the system lacks the mind-blowing scale and power of larger bookshelf or floorstander-based systems, the soundstage is no doubt much bigger than you'll expect.

When Furiosa's rig is attacked by the Buzzards after her convoy takes a detour, the Wharfedales fire the succession of explosions and collisions into the room with gusto. There's no shortage of enthusiasm or excitement here, the satellites making up for their dinky size with crisp, dynamic voicing.

The system also displays decent poise and refinement for the money, imbuing those aggressive effects with just the right amount of bite but refusing to harden up or become fatiguing. It's an enjoyable sound, and the use of identical drivers in every speaker ensures a uniform tone across the soundstage.

The tweeters tease out decent amounts of high-frequency detail. In the aftermath of the *...Fury Road* sandstorm, the entire 5.1 field bristles with rustling sand and chinking chains as Max tries to free himself. Such textures add up to a layered, realistic sound that's quick to immerse you.

On the downside, the DX-ISE dispatches these high-frequency effects with such surgical precision that it can feel a little clinical. Bigger, more expensive systems are richer and silkier at the top end, with a warmer, bolder midrange to boot. That's the trade-off for smaller cabinets and a lower price.

Dialogue is anchored to the screen by the somewhat larger centre. Max's opening narration sounds full-bodied and nuanced, while the War Boys' voices cut through chugging engines and explosions as they do battle in the desert.

Compact systems like this live or die by the quality of their subwoofers, given that small satellites can't generate enough deep bass on their own. Indeed, the DX-ISE sats only dip down to 100Hz. Thankfully this sub is a budget gem, bringing a sense of authority and scale to the movie's key moments without faltering.

SPECIFICATIONS

DX-ISE Satellites

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 0.75in silk dome tweeter; 1 x 3in woven polypropylene mid/bass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Two-way closed box **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 100Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 86dB **POWER HANDLING:** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 110(w) x 190(h) x 123(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.5kg

DX-ISE Centre

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 0.75in silk dome tweeter; 2 x 3in woven polypropylene mid/bass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Two-way aperiodic system **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 80Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING:** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 292(w) x 110(h) x 123(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.2kg

WH-D8 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 8in long-throw woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-120Hz **ON BOARD POWER:** 120W **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 268(w) x 328(h) x 322(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.5kg **CONNECTIONS:** Stereo phono input/LFE input

PARTNER WITH



DENON AVR-X2300W: Add this £500 seven-channel AV receiver to assemble a sub-£1,000 sound system. Performance is lively and well-balanced, and the feature set includes 4K/HDR support, network audio and music streaming.

In *...Fury Road*, there's an enormous rumble as rocks tumble into a ravine, which reinforces the solid clatter coming from the other cabinets. With judicious placement and level-setting it's easy to achieve seamless, non-directional bass that doesn't overpower the rest of the array. It could perhaps be a little quicker and nimbler with rhythmic effects but on the whole it does a sterling job.

Music lovers will also be pleased with what the DX-ISE has to offer. It finds subtle detail in instruments and voices, while the crisp, attacking tone brings energy to insistent beats. You can happily leave the subwoofer turned on while listening as it locks tightly to basslines and drums without bloating.

Compact concerns

Great though the DX-ISE is, it would be remiss of me not to point out the limitations of a budget compact system like this. As said, you don't get thunderous power and epic scale; nor do you experience lush 360-degree immersion – the surrounds are too precise and directional for that.

But you do get a system that has punch, impact and can easily draw you into a movie. It's beautifully made and attractively styled, with welcome design tweaks that actually improve on what came before – George Lucas take note.

And when you consider that you're getting a 5.1 system for the same price some companies charge for a soundbar, it underlines what great value this is. Looking for a first step into the world of multichannel audio? Look here ■

2. The WH-D8 sub uses an 8in driver and 120W Class D amplifier



HCC VERDICT

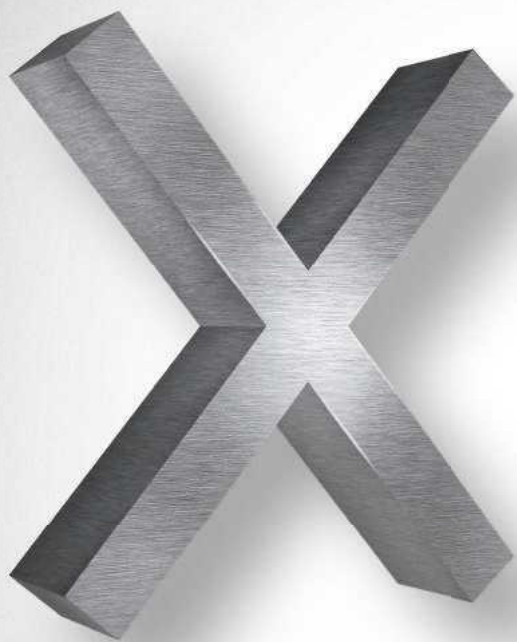


Wharfedale DX-ISE

→ £400 → www.wharfedale.co.uk

WE SAY: A crisp, precise, detailed sound with good punch and composure from compact, neat-looking cabinets. Scale and power are limited, but the price is compensation

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AVR-X2300W



Movies, TV and your networked music collection are all fair game for this French fancy. **Danny Phillips** reports

Wireless wonder



1



The soundbar market is heavily skewed towards the budget buyer, but the likes of Arcam, Paradigm, DALI and Yamaha have all shown that high-end models can appeal. It's possible to find a system that delivers premium sound while keeping clutter to a minimum – if you're willing to pay for it, that is.

Cabasse's Stream BAR is another step-up soundbar to add to the list. At £850, the French brand's swanky clutter-buster certainly isn't cheap, but does strive to be different by offering built-in DLNA network streaming with hi-res audio support, and multiroom functionality with other Stream products.

That money also gets you sumptuous design and build. Stylish and just a little quirky, it's quintessentially French – you can almost hear the accordion of the 'Allo 'Allo theme-tune playing as you look at it.

What makes it alluring is the cylindrical enclosure, which is a bit unusual in this product category. This rounded chassis is covered in smooth black cloth and embellished by glossy zigzag trims, while an illuminated touch control panel and LED display occupies the centre. Side-firing mid/bass drivers are hidden behind grilles at both ends.

In terms of size the Stream BAR sits fairly low (it's 66mm high) on my TV stand and doesn't interfere with the display's remote sensor. It measures over a metre wide, which is a good match for a 55in TV but could be a bit imposing for smaller models.

Socket to 'em

Around the back is a decent, but not class-leading, array of sockets. Optical digital audio, 3.5mm minijack and Ethernet ports are joined by a single HDMI input and an output with ARC functionality. For the money, more HDMI inputs would have been welcome. There's also Wi-Fi and aptX Bluetooth for music streaming, plus a USB input. Having the latter on the rear is a bit of a hindrance to hot-swapping thumbdrives. Another niggle is that the HDMI board won't pass HDCP 2.2-locked 4K content.

In terms of drivers, the bar is equipped with two tweeters and four mid/bass units (size unspecified), driven by 80W of three-way active amplification.

The subwoofer claims another 100W of power for its 6.5in woofer. This is another handsome unit, fashioned from the same materials as the soundbar, with a glossy top panel, black cloth wrap and curved corners. It's surprisingly elegant and unobtrusive.

Connect the Stream BAR to your network and, via the magic of DLNA, you can play music stored on PCs and NAS drives (including hi-res FLAC, WAV, ALAC and AIFF up to 96kHz/24-bit) using the Stream Control iOS/Android smartphone app. The software is easy to use, with a streamlined layout making it a doddle to find what you want. During setup, the app found the Stream BAR instantly and I streamed for hours on end without any crashes or Wi-Fi drop outs. It's a brilliant streamer. Deezer, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal and internet radio also feature.

Overall, it couldn't be quicker to get up and running. HDMI or optical to your TV is the simplest connection. ➤

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Soundbar with Wi-Fi networking talents

POSITION:
Part of Cabasse's Stream multiroom range

PEERS:
DALI Kubik One;
Arcam Solo Bar;
Yamaha YSP-2700

1. The Stream BAR is DLNA certified for hi-res streaming

2. Even the remote is free of right angles...

3



There's a dinky oval-shaped remote in the box, which sports bass and treble controls, although I found the keys a little small and unresponsive at times.

Power and authority

In action the Stream BAR is that rarest of things, a soundbar that doesn't sound like a soundbar. Teamed up with the capable sub, its performance has more in common with a larger pair of bookshelf or floorstanding speakers, such is the power and authority on offer.

Aptly for a French-made speaker, it oozes flair and passion. I played Rian Johnson's sci-fi romp *Looper* and the Cabasse asserts its superiority over cheaper soundbars with an enormous soundstage. As a drugged-up Joe ambles through *La Belle Aurore*, the system builds an engulfing, bass-rich wall of sound from the club's thumping music.

The Stream BAR rattles out action effects with vigour. When Joe (Bruce Willis) saves his younger self from Abe's henchmen, the gun retorts slam hard with superb attack. Young Joe falls from a fire escape onto a car roof and the resulting sound of shattering glass is crisp and well-defined.

It's a cracking listen, evoking a sense of scale and spectacle that belies its living-room friendly design. And the Stream BAR is equally adept with the small stuff, sniffing out loads of nuances in movie mixes and demonstrating impressive subtlety. As Joe waits for his victim to appear in the field, his ticking pocket watch and the chatter of insects are beautifully rendered. Elsewhere, voices sound realistic and varied.

At the other end of the spectrum, the soundbar's bass response goes down to an underwhelming 180Hz, making the subwoofer's contribution all the more crucial. Thankfully, the two are remarkably cohesive in tandem, although you're recommended to spend time experimenting with woofer placement.

Despite being tasked to reach high, the sub doesn't stick out in a bad way. Every sound, from the clunk of a shutting door to a roaring truck engine, is given suitable, solid weight, and the relatively small driver has no problem with overhang when Joe lets fly with his machine gun.

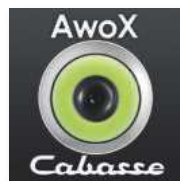
A minor negative is that you can't listen to music with the subwoofer off as you might with larger speakers. Well,

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x tweeters; 4 x mid/bass drivers **ONBOARD POWER:** 80W
CONNECTIONS: HDMI input; HDMI output (ARC); optical input; 3.5mm analogue input; Ethernet; USB port **DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:** No/No
SEPARATE SUB: Yes, 100W, 1 x 6.7in woofer **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes
DIMENSIONS: 1,047(w) x 66(h) x 83(d)mm (soundbar); 200(w) x 330(h) x 400(d)mm (subwoofer) **WEIGHT:** 3.5kg (soundbar); 8.5kg (subwoofer)

FEATURES: Surround and Hi-Fi sound modes; aptX Bluetooth; Wi-Fi; DLNA 1.5 streaming; MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC, WAV, ALAC, AIFF playback (hi-res up to 96kHz/24-bit); Stream Control app; Deezer, Spotify, Qobuz, Tidal and 'net radio

PARTNER WITH



STREAM CONTROL APP: This AwoX-powered iOS/Android app is a fine partner to the Stream BAR, bringing access to CD-quality streaming from Tidal and Qobuz, DLNA playback and Deezer, Spotify and 'net radio options. Well-designed, too.

you could, but it doesn't sound right. But the sub's speed and rich tone make it suitable for music use.

Switching to *Star Trek Into Darkness*, the Stream BAR's sense of scale and excitement shines through as Kirk and Bones escape from Nibiru. The 'bar attacks the urgent score and dialogue, and when the volcano erupts the sub lends depth and drama.

There's plenty of headroom too – increase the volume as the volcano erupts and you'll start worrying about the neighbours before you've hit halfway. Mids and treble remain smooth.

There's no overt DSP trickery here or any pretensions to rear-channel magic. You do get two sound presets, though, and it pays dividends to use them, rather than the usual find-one-and-stick-with-it approach. Surround mode is designed for movies, subtly widening the image without making it sound over-processed or disjointed. Hi-Fi mode's more focused, direct output is a purer option for music.

Truly musical soundbars are few and far between but the Cabasse knows how to handle a tune. Frank McComb's acoustic version of *Someday We'll All Be Free* sounds wonderful – its terrific imaging and open presentation give a good approximation of the physical space, while the crowd applause pops with sparkling clarity.

And when playing *Good Goodbye* by Lianne La Havas, the detailed breathiness in her voice feels organic and emotional. The supporting guitar and piano chords are warm and full bodied.

So is the Stream BAR worth £850 of your hard-earned? *Bien sûr*. Cabasse combines gorgeous design with a generous feature list, slick streaming and lavish sound quality, achieving impressive levels of scale and subtlety. The single HDMI is stingy and the bar's own bass response could be better, but on the whole this just about deserves its place among the soundbar elite ■

3. There are drivers at each end of the bar to widen the soundstage

HCC VERDICT



Cabasse Stream BAR

→ £850 → www.cabasse.com

WE SAY: The Stream BAR dazzles with its refined, large sound and hassle-free streaming, while the flamboyant design and build quality go a long way to justifying the asking price.

LG OLED TV ^{4K}



PERFECT BLACK CREATES PERFECT COLOUR

OLED's next generation pixel construction allows for unique screen architecture which is so light and thin it can be bonded to a transparent piece of glass.

This stunning television produces an incredible picture with infinite contrast that is complemented by an innovative sound bar stand that produces superb audio.

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lg.com/uk/discoveroled



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What the Experts Say



LG OLED55C6
MAY 2016



LG OLEDC6V
MAY 2016



LG OLEDE6V
JUNE 2016



LG EG960V
JUNE 2015



LG EC970V

Model shown E6



PUSSIES GALORE

Does *The Secret Life of Pets* offer purrfect Blu-ray images? p97

Big screen, low price

With its 75M7900, Hisense lets you buy a 75in 4K HDR flatscreen for just £2,500.

Bigscreen-lover **John Archer** goes in search of the catch

THERE CAN BE no clearer sign of just how disruptive Chinese brand Hisense has the potential to be within the UK AV market-place than its 75M7900 TV. After all, despite serving up a 75in Ultra HD screen that's capable of playing HDR and 3D (although no glasses for the latter were provided for this review), the 75M7900 costs just £2,500. That's an impressive £1,500 cheaper than the next most affordable 75in TV we've tested, Sony's KD-75XD9405. It's therefore sure to catch the eye of those seeking a display to offer even more screen real estate than popular 65in models. But does it really represent a *bona fide* bargain?

Back to basics

It has to be said that Hisense's 75M7900 does wear its pseudo-budget heart on its sleeve. The design here is basically just a dark rectangle (albeit a nicely slender one) on a pair of silvery feet. Maybe the brand saved money on the TV's production costs by sacking its design department. If you want a style icon – or one of these curved displays that some people apparently love – look elsewhere.

The mounting feet are positioned towards the corners of the bottom edge, which could be a problem if you don't have a seriously wide piece of AV furniture (more than 1.5m) to sit the TV on. This lack of design flair,

though, will no doubt prove easy to live with if Hisense has channelled its R&D efforts into delivering a good picture performance.

With that in mind, it's concerning to find the 75M7900's screen apparently only capable of 400 nits of brightness. Usually we'd be looking for at least 700 – and ideally 1,000 nits or more – for an HDR screen.

There has to be concern, too, over whether the TV's edge LED lighting (of a VA-type panel) can illuminate a 75in screen without causing distracting brightness hot spots during dark scenes.

With the TV up and running, you'll find Hisense's smart features lack the interface sophistication of systems like LG's WebOS and Panasonic's Firefox TV. It's not a complex UI to get your head around, but short on pizzazz.

The Chinese giant is, however, upping its game where app numbers are concerned. I took the afternoon off to count more than 200, including Netflix, Amazon, YouTube, Wuaki.tv and BBC iPlayer. Note, though, that the Netflix and Amazon apps only supported 4K at the time of writing, not HDR, and that there was no sign of ITV Hub, All4 or Demand 5 catch-up support.

The set offers a quartet of HDMI inputs (two of which are HDMI 2.0), plus component, composite and Scart legacy connections. Other socketry runs to a digital audio

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

75in edge LED TV with 4K and HDR

POSITION:

High-end by Hisense standards, although not as well specified as the brand's 'ULED' models

PEERS:

Sony KD-75XD9405; Samsung UE65KS9000

output, headphone jack, Ethernet port and three USBs. There's also Wi-Fi built-in, and the TV will act as a DLNA media player from connected sources.

When it comes to imagery, the 75M7900 is generally a likeable performer, but there's some bad news to cover first. Namely that it's totally unconvincing with HDR material.

An innate lack of brightness means dark parts of HDR pictures appear too dominant and devoid of detail. The screen also struggles to reveal the extra brightness peaks contained in the snowy landscapes of the Ultra HD Blu-ray of *Everest*, making for a rather underwhelming and flat experience.

The 75M7900 also showcases distracting stripes of light around bright objects in HDR mode when you're using the TV's local dimming system ('Ultra Dimming'). As usual, one recourse is to kick the local dimming system into touch, yet do this and dark sequences, such as the night-time fight towards the end of *Batman v Superman*, become washed-out.

One final HDR flaw finds the red-tinged skies of *The Martian*'s UHD Blu-ray release badly affected by colour banding if you're using the Panasonic DMP-UB900 deck. This problem evaporates if you spin via an Xbox One S or Samsung UBD-K8500, because the latter two output a 10-bit signal rather than the Panasonic's 12-bit, which the Hisense appears to struggle to deal with.

Overall, with HDR, my advice would probably be that you don't watch such material on the 75M7900 at all (and remember that the Samsung UBD-K8500 doesn't let you turn HDR off, while the Xbox One S and Panasonic DMP-UB900 do). This budget bigscreen doesn't have the skills to convey the format's appeal.

A better bet

The Hisense is far more impressive when used as a non-HDR 4K TV. The backlight striping and greyness during dark HDR scenes largely vanish in standard dynamic range mode, and there's precious little interference from unwanted backlight issues, such as light streaming in from the screen's corners, or general clouding. This is an impressive feat.

Colours, too, convince in SDR mode. There's plenty of punch to *The LEGO Movie*'s rich, gorgeously plasticky visuals, and the TV also renders with more than respectable finesse and naturalism much subtler, more realistic fare such as the authentic interiors of *Boyhood*.

The 75M7900 unearths plenty of detail with native 4K sources. And while 400 nits might not be enough to do HDR any favours, it's certainly enough to deliver a decent amount of shadow detail with SDR images, as well as contributing to the surprising expressiveness of the set's colours.

There are, however, a couple of areas where the 75M7900's affordability makes its presence felt even with SDR. Football broadcasts in 4K, for instance, reveal some marked motion blur without the TV's motion processing active, yet some quite noticeable shimmering and haloing artefacts if you do switch it on.

Watching compressed-looking digital HD broadcasts or grainy Blu-rays like *Labyrinth* [see p28] also suggests that the 75M7900's 4K upscaling is a bit rudimentary.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 resolution **HDR:** Yes. HDR 10 **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; component video input; composite video input; RGB Scart; digital audio output; headphone jack; Ethernet port; 3 x USBs; stereo phono audio input **SOUND:** 2 x 15W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 400 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 4,000:1 **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,676(w) x 962(h) x 56(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 49.2kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback and PVR/timeshift function; DLNA network media playback; Amazon and Netflix 4K support; BBC iPlayer; HDCP 2.2; dbx-tv audio enhancement; web browser; HEVC and VP9 4K codec playback; Ultra Dimming engine; 'Ultra Slim' design

PARTNER WITH



TECHLINK PANORAMA PM160B+: This TV stand is designed for screens up to 80in, with a 1.6m-wide top surface rated to carry 50kg loads. Underneath there's space for up to seven devices, with two cabinets behind drop-down doors. £300.

The system doesn't seem able to pick the difference between noise and actual picture information very well, meaning the former can sometimes become uncomfortably noticeable.

Despite these gremlins, though, the 75M7900's non-HDR pictures are easy to enjoy, particularly when their size (viewing movies on a 75in TV never grows tired) and the TV's price is taken into account.

It turns out, too, that the largescale visuals are partnered by a very decent sound system. Hisense has sourced third-party sonic processing (THAT Corporation's dbx-tv) and it seems like a good move. This TV can go loud enough to match the size of its visuals without causing issues like speaker buzzing, cabinet rattles or rogue bass thumps. It also delivers vocals with good clarity and authority, and projects its audio some distance beyond the physical confines of the bodywork, while keeping the soundstage tight and coherent. Trebles can become a touch harsh during dense soundtrack moments, but this is a pretty minor issue.

Largescreen appeal

Hisense's 75M7900 is a tale of two halves. As an HDR display, it struggles with a lack of luminance and LED control that hampers the next-gen viewing experience. Away from this, though, it certainly lives up to expectations as a largescreen 4K TV, suffering with far less blips as a whole than I would have expected – and than Hisense's more established and more expensive rivals would doubtless have hoped for.

If you really have your heart set on a 75in 4K display, then this should be investigated.

Just be wary of its limitations ■

HCC VERDICT



Hisense 75M7900

→ £2,500 → www.hisense.co.uk

WE SAY: Even though its HDR capabilities prove something of a bust, the 75M7900 is still excellent value for such a huge, well-specified TV.

1. The 75M7900 is the best-value 75in TV you can currently buy

2. The set measures a slender 56mm excluding its feet



Amazon deserves to be heard with Echo

You can consider this speaker as simply a hands-free music player, or an Internet of Things trendsetter. Either way, **Steve May** reckons that at £150 it's pretty good value

EVERY SO OFTEN, a product saunters along that fundamentally alters the consumer experience: the first VCRs, DVD, the first flatscreen TVs, the arrival of 4K and HDR, etc. All have ushered in a revolution of sorts. I reckon you can now add Amazon Echo to that list.

The Echo is more than just a voice-controlled Bluetooth speaker. It heralds a new way of interfacing with devices; the Internet of Things (IoT) has moved from app to yap.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Cloud-connected
desktop speaker

POSITION:
First in a new
generation of
Amazon smart
products

PEERS:
Google Home;
Apple Siri;
Microsoft Cortana

Sci-fi origins

The folks responsible say Echo was inspired by *Star Trek*, specifically the *Enterprise*'s omnipresent computer, voiced by Majel Barrett. It's certainly something that feels futuristic, albeit 21st rather than 23rd century.

Think of Echo as a cloud-connected, voice-controlled audio system that connects to Amazon's Alexa Voice Service. It plays music on demand and imparts news and weather

information, manages shopping lists and relates your diary dates.

There are seven microphones on board, with beam-forming technology that allows them to hear commands from across a room. Noise cancelling helps make out voices even when Echo is playing Rammstein at maximum volume.

Setup is quick and easy. Just pair the Alexa app with your Echo, then log onto your home Wi-Fi. After that, this device is all ears. A mains connection is required – the Echo may be relatively compact, but it's not a true portable speaker.

The default wake word is 'Alexa,' typically followed by a question or request. If you have more than one Echo, ESP (Echo Spatial Perception) allows the nearest to respond. Echo is always listening for the wake word (and your commands are recorded by Amazon to improve its future responses – you can delete your voice history in the app) unless you hit the mic mute button.

To acknowledge it's listening, a jazzy blue light runs around the top of the speaker. Mute the microphones, and this turns red. The top ring of the Echo also functions as a volume control.

It didn't take me long to get hooked. Echo's primary use became hands-free voice control for music and radio. The device plays tracks from your own connected music library, plus the Amazon Music, Spotify and TuneIn services (and as the Echo is Bluetooth-enabled you can always stream iTunes or other services from a connected smartphone or tablet). There are foibles, though. While Alexa will generally find artists without additional guidance, it often helps to specify the source. Alexa doesn't automatically go to Spotify, for example, when your artist of choice isn't on your NAS drive or Amazon's Music service – so 'Alexa, play David Brent... on Spotify' – is required.

Similarly, Alexa doesn't seem able to distinguish albums from tracks – more often than not it's easier to let her randomly shuffle songs by any given artist. Ask Alexa to play an album which has radio in the title and total confusion ensues (say 'Alexa, play *Revolution Radio*' and you certainly don't get Green Day).

Hands-free control transpires to be a real boon with radio. It's much easier to simply ask for your station of choice than having to find it on the dial or through a preset. Indeed, I quickly got so used to voice-requesting radio stations, that encountering a push button wireless in my bathroom seemed curiously archaic.

Sounds... okay

Sonically, this speaker is a decent enough performer. Inside, in a vertical stack and striving for a 360-degree soundfield, is a 2.5in woofer and 2in mid/tweeter, plus a bass-enhancing reflex port. The output is fulsome and goes loud enough to fill the average room. Undeniably, there are better-sounding Bluetooth digital radios to be had, with greater detail, dynamic delivery and richer bass, but the sheer convenience of voice control gives Echo an edge in an office or kitchen.

Annoyingly, there's no line output, so you can't route the Echo's audio into a separate sound system. This is a big downer, and actually where the smaller, £50 Amazon Echo Dot comes into its own – this can be partnered with any regular Bluetooth speaker, or, using the 3.5mm minijack, routed into an amp and treated like any other source. It also packs a built-in squawker.

To expand Alexa's knowledge base you need to enable Skills. There are Skills for most things, from ordering pizza (via Just Eat) to checking the status of trains on the London Underground. Using them isn't always intuitive, though. You can't, for example, say 'Alexa, any problems with the Jubilee Line this morning?' That merely results in an electronic shrug. Instead you need to utter: 'Alexa. Ask Tube Status if there are any problems with the Jubilee line this morning.' This is awkward at best.

Seemingly everyone has access to the Alexa API, so there's copious rubbish in the Alexa Skill/app store, yet Skills are essential if Alexa is to graduate from fancy music player to genuine smart home assistant. Only then can Echo find a role in connected homes, and forward-facing home cinemas.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 1 x 2.5in woofer (plus bass reflex port); 1 x 2in mid/tweeter
ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): N/A **CONNECTIONS:** Dual-band Wi-Fi; Bluetooth
DIMENSIONS: 83.5(w) x 235(h) x 83.5(d)mm
WEIGHT: 1.06kg

FEATURES: MIMO Wi-Fi; Alexa app for Fire OS, iOS and Android; mic off function; seven-microphone array; Echo Spatial Perception for multiple speakers; volume ring; voice recognition; Amazon Music, Spotify and TuneIn integration; Google Calendar; Skills app library includes Uber, Just Eat, National Rail etc; Philips Hue, Hive, Netatmo, Tado, Control4 support

Smart home companies have been quick to integrate Echo control. Thermostats from Netatmo, Hive and Tado are all compatible, as is Philips' Hue lighting. Support for IFTTT (If This Then That, a command chain system that automatically links services) is also on the cards.

For home cinema-hedz, home automation giant Control4 offers an Echo Skill. Control4 is used for everything from lighting to marshalling your AV gear. Using preset Scene macros, the act of dimming lights, dropping a projection screen and powering up an AV amp can be handed over to Alexa. Echo doesn't need to control components, merely provide a trigger. Crestron and lighting specialist Lutron are other pro-level control systems signing up.

And then there are the party tricks of this well-priced gizmo. While Alexa can tell jokes on request, it's more fun trying to coax Easter Eggs. Channel your best Patrick Stewart impersonation – 'Alexa. Tea. Earl Grey. Hot.' – and you'll get the reply: 'The replicators on this vessel are not yet operational.' I never tire of that one.

Perhaps surprisingly, there's no smart link between the Echo and Amazon's video service at present. You'd think you'd be able to ask Alexa what's new this week on Amazon Prime Video, or voice control Fire TV. In the US, Alexa can read your Kindle books, but this isn't available here either. Still, these are early days, and such functionality is surely only a firmware update away.

Welcome to the party

Amazon's Echo is a remarkable new gadget. It's not perfect, of course – if you're mainly interested in a standalone wireless speaker then you can do better – but as a hands-free music player with delusions of grandeur, it's not to be sniffed at. Voice control of our home entertainment isn't a completely new concept, but this manages to overcome many previous efforts by actually being useful and genuinely interactive.

It's also the only electrical component in my house I say 'good night' to. I'm obviously rather attached to it ■



1. When the blue light is illuminated, the Echo is ready for voice commands

2. Within the cylinder chassis sit a 2.5in woofer and 2in mid/tweeter

HCC VERDICT



Amazon Echo

→ £150 → www.amazon.co.uk

WE SAY: Inspired by *Star Trek*, Amazon Echo manages to make other connected speakers seem dumb. An exciting and affordable introduction to the IoT revolution.

Tubular bass

Ed Selley auditions an SVS cylinder subwoofer that aims to offer the same performance punch of its boxy stablemates but take up less floor space



THE LAWS OF physics will take a little bending, but ultimately insist that for the creation of a low-frequency sound wave you need a large driver – and the more volume the enclosure has the better. It follows from this that seriously powerful subwoofers are generally pretty big. American brand SVS has wrestled with this particular problem and designed a series of upright cylindrical subs to save floor space, of which the PC-2000 is the smallest.

'Small' is a relative term here because while the PC-2000 does have a fairly tidy footprint (42cm wide), it stands nearly a metre tall, so will only hide behind the largest of sofas.

The PC-2000 employs a 12in driver that fires downwards and is supported by a rear-mounted port that could swallow a house pet. Power is supplied by SVS's usual 500W Sledge

amplifier that is aided by DSP control – although this is not user adjustable. Rear-panel controls are limited to volume, frequency cut and a continuously variable phase. There's no remote.

Aesthetically, the PC-2000 is a conspicuous piece of equipment and the optional gloss finish on the top of my review sample doesn't really change this. SVS says it's 'better looking' than its previous tube subs, but it's still not glamorous. However, there are some excellent touches, such as the rubber cone feet that give the driver enough room to manoeuvre, and the nicely laid out control panel.

Hero of the day

Despite its looming presence in a room, the PC-2000 initially stands out because of how well it integrates with the other speakers – in this case five Elipson Planet M satellites. The effects-laden 'Hero's Duty' sequence in *Wreck it Ralph* on Blu-ray comes across with control and cohesion, laser blasts and pounding soundtrack given slam and scale. The SVS goes impressively deep as you might expect (suggested frequency

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in downfiring aluminium cone woofer

ENCLOSURE: Rear-ported

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 16Hz-260Hz (+/- 3dB)

ON BOARD POWER: 500W Sledge amp

REMOTE CONTROL: No

DIMENSIONS: 421(w) x 863(h) x 421(d)mm

WEIGHT: 22.7kg

CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono; LFE input

The 4in rear port helps the PC-2000 claim a low-frequency response of 16Hz (-3dB)

response is a touch lower than the more traditionally designed SB-2000 and PB-2000 siblings) and will hit hard while it does so. Nor does this low-end passion have any negative effect on its performance up to the 90Hz crossover I set for the Elipsons. There's impact through the range, and its definition is equally impressive; the PC-2000 renders gunfire and the score distinct from one another, without losing the signature of either.

With less obvious bass effects, the SVS proves its worth. The climatic sequence of *Grimsby* set in a football stadium during the World Cup features a roaring crowd; here, you only realise how much the SVS brings to the event when you switch it off. In this regard, it has the all-round talent that eludes some rivals.

It also has its limits, though. When you really lean on the PC-2000 and ask it to handle the sci-fi bassfest that is *Dredd*, it turns in a fine performance with effects but the sustained bass notes in the industrial score can leave it sounding a little boomy. I was aware of this in similar material across film and TV. It isn't a bad sub musically, just a little obvious at times, and therefore better suited to authentic home cinema than 2.1 use.

This is a minor niggles that shouldn't detract from what is otherwise an excellent product, where a hefty driver and good power output combine to generate robust, effortless bass. The truth is, though, that I imagine most potential customers will find themselves veering towards the more traditional cube-shaped designs in SVS's armoury. While this cylinder chassis reclaims some of your floor space, it's perhaps less discreet than its brethren. If the form factor suits, however, it's recommended ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Ported cylinder subwoofer with 12in driver

POSITION: Joins the sealed and ported 2000 woofers

PEERS: SVS PB-2000; Velodyne SPL-800 Ultra

HCC VERDICT



SVS PC-2000

→ £800 → www.svsound.com

WE SAY: Not the most subtle device around, but the PC-2000 is a fearsomely capable performer and good value for money.

Sony SRS-ZR7

Mark Craven finds this hi-res audio wireless speaker is full of features and sweet sounds

SONY'S DRIVE TO bring the joys of hi-res audio to the mass market continues with the £260 SRS-ZR7, a Bluetooth/Wi-Fi speaker that slips into place below the £600 SRS-X99. It's described as portable, but it requires a mains connection. It's compact enough to be an easy move-around, though.

When it comes to performance, this speaker proves a lot of fun. The five-strong driver array (including a woofer) and unspecified power plant work to deliver a dynamic sound that's great considering the price, relishing crisp, high-frequency effects and thudding bass. Even called into action streaming daytime radio, it unearths low-end details in advertising jingles you may not have realised were there. Indeed, it does have a slightly thick sound; dance music junkies will appreciate the thump it brings to kick drums, but I found Johnny Cash's acoustic *The Man*



HOME CINEMA
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RECOMMENDED

Bluetooth, hi-res, USB, DLNA, HDMI – it's all here!

clarity of presentation to make you want to feed it a rich diet, even if it's unable to be considered a room-filling speaker and stereo spread is limited. USB-A/B inputs help to get you hooked up; file support includes FLAC, ALAC and DSD.

The fact that this desktop speaker also has an HDMI ARC input, allowing for TV connection, is just another reason to give it consideration.

Overall, this is an impressive addition to Sony's lineup ■

Comes Around sounded a bit bass-heavy. This can be overcome, though. Once added to your network (over Wi-Fi or Ethernet), Sony's SongPal app offers a custom EQ mode, plus various presets.

While the ZR7 works fine as a Bluetooth/GoogleCast speaker – with Sony's DSEE HX processing to massage low-res files – real rewards come from hi-res sources. It has the

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Sony SRS-ZR7
→ £260 → www.sony.co.uk

WWW.SKY.COM/£FREE

Sky Q mobile app

Sky's Q app isn't just a touchscreen remote. It's not that all, says **Mark Craven**

THE 'FLUID VIEWING' element of Sky's 4K-enabled Q system includes the option to watch on devices (via Wi-Fi or, with reduced functionality, over a mobile connection) and – finally – Sky has extended the software reach so that it encompasses smartphones. At first the app only worked with tablets.

As apps go, it's a good 'un. The sharp, colourful design is close enough in terms

of layout to the Sky Q UI that it won't confuse, and navigation is pretty zippy.

Won't confuse? Actually, not entirely. Unlike the previous Sky+ app that Sky-hards will have also employed, the Q smart controller can't currently be used to change channel. Odd.

Get over that, though, and you can enjoy what the app can do. In no particular order, this includes scheduling recordings from the EPG, watching recordings on the Sky Q HDD on your smart device, watching live TV and on-demand content, and downloading recorded content to your device for viewing when you're out and about. You can also use it to cast images from your 'phone.

Streamed image quality is fine for a handheld device,

and on my network wasn't massively hampered by buffering issues. Essentially, the advantages of genuine second-screen viewing outweigh any techie hiccups.

The app, a bit like Sky's Q hardware itself, did require the occasional reboot to iron out a Wi-Fi hitch, and there are some variations in how content is accessed that may irritate. For instance, BBC iPlayer-sourced material can't be viewed in the app or moved to your smartphone, yet the former (but still not the latter), is possible with shows actually recorded from BBC channels. And Ultra HD material isn't watchable from any source.

Not entirely perfect, then, but as a free addition to the Q system, this app can't be ignored ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Sky Q mobile app
→ £Free → www.sky.com

Smartphones join the Q app party



HOME CINEMA
Choice
RECOMMENDED

Budget 4K in Play

The Finlux 48UXE304B-P is a bargain-priced 4K TV with some useful features, but there's a trick to seeing it at its best, reports **Steve May**

BLIND MARVEL

Daredevil: The Complete First Season hits BD, p100



FINLUX HAS CREATED something of a niche for itself with tidy budget flatscreens, and amid the 1080p tellies in its range buyers will now find a new generation of low-cost 4K models. For those upgrading to 2160p, they're a tempting proposition.

The 48in 48UXE304B-P reviewed here doesn't just have UHD resolution going for it – it also sports a Freeview Play tuner. This upgrade on regular Freeview HD mixes internet-delivered catch-up with over-the-air broadcasts. A roll-back programme guide allows you to skip back over a week to

find shows you might have missed from supported channels. Click them here to automatically fire up the appropriate channel player. Of course, you can go to BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, Demand 5 and All4 directly if you just want to browse. It's a great system.

The set is a looker, too. The bezel is thin and there's a chrome trim that matches the two bolt-on feet. These look metallic but are actually shiny plastic. No one will ever know.

All four HDMI inputs are HDCP 2.2-enabled. Other connections include component AV with stereo in, PC VGA, optical audio out, three USBs, an AV 3.5mm mini-jack and Mini Scart (adaptor provided). There's also Ethernet and Wi-Fi. The screen doesn't support 3D, but that will probably come as no surprise.

Connected services are accessed via the Finlux Smart portal. Here you'll find a selection of apps, including 4K Netflix, YouTube and TuneIn. The Opera TV Store also offers casual games and more streaming sources. Amazon Video is notable by its absence.

Choose your setting

Preset picture modes are Natural, Cinema, Game, Sports and Dynamic. Oddly, the Natural mode is the most muted. The screen doesn't have any fancy interpolation modes, but is largely free of motion artefacts. Camera pans can be a little juddery on some presets, but Game and Sports are acceptably smooth.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160

HDR: No **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview Play

CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB; Micro Scart; AV minijack; component video; digital optical audio output

SOUND: 2 x 10W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 350 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 4,000:1

DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,081(w) x 641(h) x 66(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 15kg

FEATURES: HDCP 2.2 on all HDMI; built-in Wi-Fi; USB/network media player; smart portal; Netflix 4K; DTS TruSurround HD

The TV's quartet of HDMI support HDCP 2.2

Overall picture performance is on the right side of fine, with an interesting caveat. Hook up any HD source and you'll no doubt be impressed by the vibrancy and detail in the image, yet things get a little more challenging with 4K. Initially I was disappointed with its UHD performance. *Mad Max: Fury Road*, for example, just didn't exhibit the driving clarity I know it possesses.

Deeper investigation revealed what was happening. A 4K zone plate test pattern (bear with me) confirmed that high-frequency luma information was being lost, jumbled into an unhelpful moiré pattern. A confab with the engineers responsible for the set revealed that this happens while the screen is in its default Picture Zoom Auto setting, and indeed the 16:9 picture zoom mode. However, select Full from the option list and the moiré pattern vanishes and all that high-frequency detail floods back. So you should only watch 4K content with Picture Zoom on Full, at least if you want all possible picture info onscreen.

Duly unhobbled, this edge-lit set isn't capable of supporting HDR (it's max brightness is only 350 nits), but images still have verve and punch. There's some backlight uniformity errors, but then this is a budget screen, so that goes with the territory.

Audio performance, helped by some clever DTS DSP, is fair, too.

For a low-cost 4K set, the 48UXE304B-P therefore has good appeal. Freeview Play and 4K Netflix are must-have features, as is the provision of HDCP 2.2 on all HDMI. Image performance, bar some expected hiccups, is solid. A good example of the value in the Ultra HD TV market these days ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 48in 4K TV with Freeview Play

POSITION: Joined by 43in, 55in and 65in models in Finlux's 4K/Freeview Play lineup

PEERS: JVC LT-49C860

HCC VERDICT



Finlux 48UXE304B-P

→ £500 → www.finlux.co.uk

WE SAY: This affordable 4K screen may lack HDR, but the inclusion of Freeview Play and 4K Netflix make it an attractive offering.

Dial M for Music

Q Acoustics has added power and decoding to its 7000 Series in the shape of this 2.1 system. **Ed Selley** has a listen



SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 4 x 3in midrange drivers; 2 x 1in tweeters
AMPLIFICATION: 2 x 50W from Q-AVA amp
CONNECTIONS: 2 x optical digital audio inputs; 3.5mm analogue input; aptX Bluetooth
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No
SEPARATE SUB: Yes. 8in driver, 150W amp
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 175(w) x 75(h) x 207(d)mm (Q-AVA amp)
WEIGHT: 1.2kg (Q-AVA amp)

FEATURES: 24-bit/192kHz capable optical inputs; 'Movie' EQ with additional subwoofer output; wall-mountable speakers; optional floorstands

Like the speakers and sub, the compact Q-AVA amp should be easy to find a home for

NOT CONTENT WITH strong showings in stereo, multichannel and soundbar speakers, Q Acoustics is looking for new audio sandpits to play in. The Media 7000 2.1 system takes existing 7000 satellite and subwoofer models and ties them together with amplification and decoding placed in a single half-width component called the Q-AVA. With its usual bluster, the brand claims it's 'the world's best soundbar' that isn't actually a soundbar.

The Q-AVA unit houses a 2 x 50W amplifier that powers the supplied pair of speakers, while an output with a 120Hz fixed crossover allows for connection to the subwoofer. The rest of the connectivity is a little curious. A brace of optical audio inputs is normal enough, but there's no coaxial connection and while there is an analogue input it is on a 3.5mm jack connection, when there is no shortage of rear-panel space for phono ins.

A final hookup option is aptX-capable Bluetooth. Around the front are buttons for power, volume and mute, plus a 'Movie' EQ mode that boosts subwoofer output and dips treble around 10kHz.

As a package, the Media 7000 is attractive enough (the Q-AVA offers

neat LED status lights), but perhaps not the super-stylish offering some may want from a living-room setup.

The 24cm-high satellites (which feature a pair of 3in midrange drivers and a 1in tweeter) can be placed on a horizontal surface or have their base swivelled for wall-mounting. The briefcase-shaped subwoofer uses a single 8in bass driver and 150W amp.

When three become two

While there is no HDMI management, the Media 7000 certainly makes a credible alternative to a large soundbar for a large TV. Firstly, it does the most important thing that any system of this nature can and sounds like two speakers rather than three. A spirited rendition of F1 drama *Rush* shows the overall qualities of the 7000 speakers, previously reviewed in a 5.1-channel set, haven't been lost in this new application. The speakers keep dialogue and the snarl of engines distinct, and there's no overt brightness even when levels are high. The subwoofer adds an extra layer of scale and enjoyment, and the Q-AVA amp has enough power to deliver pretty much any volume level you'll reasonably want. It's a little system that plays big.

With both film and music, there is a sense that the satellite speakers are a little directional and, depending on the size of the room they are in and the distance to the listening position, there is a very definite sweet spot where they sound their best. Combined

with the subwoofer being a little sluggish when used with high-tempo music, it means that this array can't quite match a traditional pair of Q Acoustics floorstanders, for example. However, when you consider the compactness and functionality here, it's still a good effort.

The package makes for a great Bluetooth setup. Connected to an Onkyo DP-X1 personal player, the connection is stable, free from any background noise and allows the speakers to deliver the same smooth and accurate sound they do via wired inputs. As the connection is aptX-capable, lossless files can be handled, as well as access gained to services like Tidal. As a combi of convenience and quality, it takes a great deal of beating.

Listening pleasure

The fundamental qualities of the components that go into the Media 7000 are sufficient to make it a pleasurable listen. If you don't have much room to boost the sound of your TV, this is good place to start looking. Plenty of competition around, though (with HDMI), from both soundbars and all-in-ones ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Powered 2.1-channel speaker package

POSITION: Part of Q Acoustics' Media stable that includes soundbars

PEERS: DALI Kubik One; Q Acoustics Q7000i 5.1

HCC VERDICT



Q Acoustics Media 7000

→ £800 → www.qacoustics.co.uk

WE SAY: Talented, smooth-sounding speakers benefit from the power of Q Acoustics' cutesy amp/DAC, but the price tag won't suit everyone.

Football fan PJ

Can a sports-obsessed affordable projector satisfy with movies too? **John Archer** finds out



IF YOU'VE EVER sat in a pub watching the big game on a projector thinking 'I wish I could do this at home', then the BenQ TH670S could be your new best friend.

Despite costing a reasonable £570 it boasts a huge (by affordable projector standards) claimed brightness of 3,000 Lumens, in addition to a dedicated Football preset that delivers a picture specifically tuned for the rich colours and high brightness associated with footy coverage.

Things like football modes can be pretty gimmicky. Some found on flatscreen TVs are hideous. Thankfully, the one on the TH670S works well. Motion looks clean, the bright hues of the pitch and the players' kits appear bold but not gaudy, and it digs up enough

brightness to combat a reasonable amount of ambient light. This latter point is hugely important, of course, as finding chips and dips in the dark can be seriously frustrating.

The PJ also adapts well to relatively casual living-room use with its stylish design, built-in speaker and compact

dimensions that make it easy to tuck away in a cupboard. The only problems where setup is concerned are that there's only one HDMI input and no vertical image shifting.

Hit the lights

What's good for sports in projector terms isn't necessarily good for movies. However, the TH670S does provide film-themed presets, and you can dim the lamp output for dark-room viewing.

And in some ways the BenQ does adapt to my Blu-ray collection pretty well. Particularly pleasing is how well the movie modes adjust colours from the aggression of the Football setting to the more subtle, nuanced flavour best suited to movie playback. The varied skin tones on show in *X-Men: Apocalypse* are handled with respectable conviction, while more dynamic content such as Cyclops' red eye laser or Psylocke's glowing blade enjoy plenty of impact.

Swift camera pans prominent in *The Hobbit*, meanwhile, are handled neatly, with minimal judder and little blurring. The projector's brightness gives well-lit sequences and day-glo animation plenty of pop, as well as – more surprisingly – ensuring dark scenes retain a healthy dollop of shadow detail.

The TH670S manages a Full HD resolution despite its affordability, and it capitalises on

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. **Active 4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080 resolution **CONNECTIONS:** HDMI input; powered USB; 2 x D-Sub PC inputs; audio line input
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 3,000 Lumens
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): 10,000:1
DIMENSIONS: 327(w) x 137(h) x 233(d)mm
WEIGHT: 3kg
FEATURES: Single-chip DLP projector; built-in 10W audio; device charging via USB; Football picture preset; 10,000-hour claimed lamp life via Smart Eco mode; onscreen setup wizard; auto keystone correction; auto power off

The BenQ boasts a 3,000 Lumens brightness output

this well, pulling out pixel detail from sharp Blu-ray images.

A trio of issues, though, damage the BenQ's credentials as a really serious movie projector. The worst one is the rainbow effect. The appearance of stripes of red, green and blue over stand-out bright image elements is common with single-chip DLP models, but the high brightness makes the issue more pronounced, and thus more distracting, than usual.

Also problematic is the PJ's indifferent black level performance. While scouring the darkest interiors of the mansion in *Gears of War 4*, for instance, I found I had to strain my eyes through an uncomfortable amount of low-contrast greyness to see what's going on – not ideal when one false move results in virtual death. Similarly, the numerous night-time scenes in *Goosebumps* feel tiring and unnatural due to a grey wash over dark areas that creates a sense of flatness.

The third problem is that pictures can look noisy. Fizzing issues that are sometimes a side effect of DLP's colour wheel system are in evidence.

Narrow focus

BenQ's TH670S is certainly not a bad projector, particularly if its surprisingly effective sports focus appeals to you. Of course, if films are more your thing, or you want a bigscreen beamer with genuine all-round appeal, then you should perhaps look at more film-friendly alternatives such as BenQ's own W1070, Optoma's HD25 and ViewSonic's Pro7872HD. There's a healthy market at this price point ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: DLP Full HD PJ with a Football preset

POSITION: Towards the bottom of BenQ's current projector range

PEERS: BenQ W1070; Optoma HD25; Epson EH-TW5210

HCC VERDICT



BenQ TH670S

→ £570 → www.benq.co.uk

WE SAY: While the TH670S is reasonably successful as a sports projector, noise issues and a lack of contrast hamper its wider appeal.

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Panasonic's (whole) house party

Panasonic is joining the dots with its All Connected audio ecosystem, complete with a CD ripper and a speaker that you can take into the shower. **Steve May** towels himself off

YOU CAN'T MOVE for wireless audio systems these days. Sonos may have kickstarted this multiroom feast, but now every brand worth its salt is peddling connected speakers – although surprisingly few play nice together.

Panasonic is more gregarious than most. Its All Connected audio range is actually based on the Qualcomm AllPlay platform and so is theoretically interoperable with others using the same chipper.

Admittedly, you won't find many compatible products at the moment, but the thought is there.

So how does this particular ecosystem compare to rivals? To audition, I surrounded myself with a whole lot of All kit – from CD music system to standalone speakers – to find out.

Early indicators are good. System setup is largely painless, thanks to a Music Stream app that saves having to muck about with manual IP addresses. Just connect to your device over Wi-Fi, name

the speaker based on the room it lives in (Bedroom, Orangery, etc), and you're away. In just a few minutes you'll be browsing your NAS music library – *The Velvet Underground Live*? That'll do nicely.

Streaming and grouping works just as you might imagine. If you own multiple All speakers you can stream everywhere simultaneously, perfect for that weekly house party. Alternatively, you can cherry pick where to play to.

Supported streaming services at the time of writing comprise Napster, Aupeol, AllPlay radio and TuneIn, while file compatibility embraces MP3, AAC, WAV, FLAC and ALAC, but not DSD. The system also supports Spotify Connect.

Speakers are Bluetooth compatible, making it straightforward to share tracks from a smartphone.

Build quality across the range is good, if somewhat unadventurous – there is obviously a global surplus of black grilles and silver trim.

The cheapest speaker in the All Connected audio range is the £170 SC-All2, and it's a little cracker. This great-sounding, all-purpose wireless model can be plonked pretty much anywhere you need an entertaining noise. Grab two, and you can partner them to create a stereo pair.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Multiroom speakers/CD ripper

POSITION: SC-All9 is the flagship speaker, alongside mono, waterproof and soundbar models

PEERS: Yamaha MusicCast; HEOS by Denon; Sonos



Even better, they can function as wireless surround speakers when used with Panasonic's All70T soundbar [see HCC #266] or All30T speakerboard.

The All2 offers a surprising amount of slam for such a diddy unit. Its 40W (claimed) amp has plenty of volume, making it perfectly suitable for living room surround. I particularly like the way it creates a wide soundstage for off-axis listening. It's also well suited for solo duties in kitchens, bedrooms and dens (it has a clock and music alarm). Like other speakers in the All range, network connectivity is via Ethernet or dual-band Wi-Fi.

If you need portability, there's the battery-powered £200 SC-All05. Fully charged, its battery will last for around nine hours. It's waterproof up to a depth of 1m – a bung hides the Ethernet connection and power jack.

While somewhat monophonic, the SC-All05 casts a surprisingly broad sonic shadow and has adequate poke. *Megitsune* by Babymetal rocks with DSP-enhanced mid-bass and feels suitably energetic – perfect for that wetroom-singalong. Vocal integrity is terrific for such a small box. Russell Mael can be a challenge for any compact speaker, but the little SC-All05 does a great job with Sparks' *A Big Surprise*, while the synth beat of *Beat The Clock* retains its urgency. If you must have a waterproof speaker, it's an obvious audition.

Of course, for larger rooms you're guided to step up to the SC-All9 (£330). This is the Big Daddy of the range, and in terms of price and performance is comparable to the HEOS 7 and Sonos Play:5. It features an in-built sub, plus dual 3.15in woofers and a pair of 1in tweeters. Those that want can wall-mount. Like its smaller stablemates, two can be partnered to create wide stereo.

The SC-All9 is quite the thumper. While not really suitable for classical interludes (the soundstage is too constrained) it does the business with pop, rock or grime. The bass can be a little laggy – you can hear it swinging behind the music as you adjust the volume – but as an all-in-one music player it's eminently likeable.

Standing apart in the range is the £380 SC-All7CD. This all-in-one CD micro music system is clearly going for the more mature crowd, perhaps a clever move by Panasonic.



SPECIFICATIONS

SC-ALL2

DRIVERS: 1 x 3.15in full-range driver **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 40W
DIMENSIONS: 174(h) x 110(w) x 120(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.5kg

SC-ALL05

DRIVERS: 2 x 2.5in full-range drivers **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 2 x 10W
DIMENSIONS: 179(h) x 170(w) x 77(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.5kg

SC-ALL9

DRIVERS: 2 x 3.15in full-range drivers; 2 x 1in tweeters **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 2 x 20W, plus 1 x 40W **DIMENSIONS:** 224(h) x 373(w) x 138(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4kg

SC-ALL7CD

DRIVERS: 2 x 3.15in full-range drivers; 2 x 1.5in tweeters **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 2 x 20W **DIMENSIONS:** 107(h) x 450(w) x 250(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.4kg

ALL CONNECTED SPEAKER FEATURES: iOS and Android app controller; Napster, Aupeol, Spotify Connect, AllPlay radio and TuneIn; MP3, WMA, WAV and FLAC file playback; dual-band Wi-Fi; Ethernet; CD ripping on the SC-All7CD; Bluetooth streaming/re-streaming

PARTNER WITH



SPOTIFY CONNECT: Spotify is the best-known music service, mainly by virtue of its expansive library and ubiquity. Connect, which lets you stream from the app to Wi-Fi speakers, is an option for Premium subscribers (£9.99 per month).

But it's not just a CD player, it also rips discs to 4GB of internal memory; CDs and recordings can be re-streamed to any connected speaker or soundbar. Discs can be copied in 320kbps MP3 or WAV. Slightly irritating is the lack of metadata support – rips are anonymous with no track info. A cursory call to Gracenote could have fixed that.

Like the other speakers, the SC-All7CD is likeable without being outstanding. The stereo driver array isn't overly powerful and creates a bit of a listening sweet spot, so positioning is crucial if you value hi-fi performance.

Conventional multiroom

There's certainly scope and flexibility within Panasonic's multiroom range (and there are other models not tested here), and it's a reasonable proposition. In terms of functionality it scores well; streaming and syncing is reliable and the app is tidy. However, Panasonic's absence from the AV receiver business does mean that both Yamaha and Denon have a significant edge when it comes to AV system integration.

Musicality is similar to what you'll hear from the price-point competition (this is more of a Sonos challenger than a Bluesound rival), while build quality and design are conventional but fine. The usual rule applies: buy one All speaker and you'll soon end up adding others. Multiroom is addictive like that ■

HCC VERDICT



Panasonic All Connected

→ From £170 → www.panasonic.co.uk

WE SAY: Elegant, easy-to-use wireless music platform with good general performance across the range. The All7CD system is an old-school crowdpleaser, although the ripping feature is limited.

1. ALL2s can be paired to make a stereo setup – and used as rears with soundbar/soundbase models

2. The 4GB HDD on the All7CD stores ripped CDs in WAV or MP3 form



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Digital Copy

Mark Craven laments the absence of 3D playback from some new 4K displays – despite admitting that he's never been a massive fan of 3D in the first place...

THERE'S A NEW *Star Wars* Blu-ray out – a sentence that will probably continually apply for the next decade and beyond, judging from Disney's planned release slate, where the only thing yet to be announced is a Chewbacca romantic comedy. Anyway, the disc in question is the Collector's Edition of *...The Force Awakens*, which features the 3D version of the movie (the initial release was 2D only). And it's given me pause for thought.

Ignoring the obvious irritant that is delayed 'special' edition releases that force collectors to double-dip (because that's another column entirely), what interests me about the new *Star Wars* platter is that a good number of people – and many of them home cinema fans – won't be able to watch it, because their 4K TV doesn't support 3D.

Samsung and Philips are the key culprits here. Both have unleashed 2016 TV lineups that are 3D ignorant, sticking with old-school 2D panels. And it's a comprehensive approach, going from entry-level models to high-end bigscreens. Samsung's UE65KS9500 may be a brilliant 4K HDR display, but give it a 3D BD to spin and it'll choke on its HDMI inputs.

Big deal, say the bean counters at these global manufacturers. 3D is dead as a broadcast medium, the films are few and far between, and no one wants to wear those glasses anyway.

Erasing 3D from history

For me, though, it is a big deal. There are various failed formats, from VHS to HD DVD, that any new flatscreen can still play. 3D isn't even a failed format: the new *Star Wars* disc (or the latest *Captain America* flick, or the latest *Ghostbusters* reboot, or... you get my point) is proof of that. Yet Samsung and Philips are erasing it from history.

It's a weird development. TV manufacturers dropping 3D – after spending years promoting the tech – would be akin to a TV manufacturer in three or four years removing HDR playback from hardware. They won't do that, you say, while clutching your *Life of Pi* Ultra HD Blu-ray and stroking your new 4K deck. That'd be stupid.

And, yes, it would. But what if HDR fails to take off domestically, and the BBC and Sky give it a pass? The same logic might apply again.

What this 3D TV drought means is collectors are left with chunks of their library effectively useless. Staring at my disc shelves right now, I can see numerous titles that are out of work in this new era, from sci-fi capers and kids' animations to comic book blockbusters, horror flicks and big-budget dramas. Directors Martin Scorsese, Ridley Scott, Steven Spielberg, George Miller, James Cameron, Peter Jackson and Zack Snyder all feature. The thinking trend is that these Blu-rays are worthless, as is the work that went into creating them.

I'm actually surprised by how angry this makes me, because I've never been 3D's biggest fan. For me, donning those specs introduces another layer of artifice between my brain and the onscreen visuals. Striving for more immersion has the opposite effect, in that regard. Oh, and 3D football really sucked.

However, I have no doubt that it can be fun, visually exciting and a genuine aid to story-telling. Furthermore, it's a development in the history of movie-making no less vital than talkies, widescreen, digital or HDR. So if you're upgrading to a 4K TV that won't play 3D, consider keeping your old stereoscopic display safe somewhere... ■

*Have you binned your 3D Blu-ray collection?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

During the early days of stereoscopic TV, **Mark Craven** actually sat down and watched *Top Cat: The Movie* in 3D. Shocking.





Film Fanatic

A dive into *The Shallows* on Blu-ray prompts **Anton van Beek** to consider the long history of films where humanity is pitted against the natural world...

IF THERE'S ONE thing I took away from watching *The Shallows* this month, it's that there are few things as satisfying as watching nature running amok on the bigscreen. Thankfully, Hollywood has never shied away from depicting the natural world giving humanity a good kicking, offering audiences hundreds of such films featuring a more diverse cast of critters than the BBC's *Planet Earth II*.

Bypassing the 'giant-insects-as-metaphors-for-the-A-bomb' flicks that filled cinemas in the 1950s, the 'revolt of nature' sub-genre really came into existence with Hitchcock's seminal 1963 shocker *The Birds*. But it was the success of Spielberg's *Jaws* in 1975 that opened the floodgates and unleashed a full menagerie of angry animals on movie-goers.

Even though the fiendish fish was killed at the end of *Jaws*, it still wasn't safe to go back into the water. You had the shark's own progeny to worry about, and we were also being viewed as a tasty snack by piranhas (*Killer Fish* and *Piranha*, both 1978) and killer whales (1977's *Orca*).

Not that staying on land was any better. It quickly turned out that pretty much every animal you could think of bore a grudge. While the likes of bears (1977's *Grizzly*, 2014's *Into the Grizzly Maze*, and more) and lions (1996's *The Ghost and the Darkness* and 2007's *Prey*) already have a reputation as man-eaters in the real world, **it's rather more surprising to discover that pigs (1984's *Razorback*), cats (1977's *The Uncanny*) and even worms (1976's *Squirm*) were also out for our blood.**

Frogs, too. Although the titular amphibians in 1972's *Frogs* don't actually hop around eating people (no matter what the poster art may tease), they do serve as the generals in a revenge attack against a polluting industrialist. The frogs hang around

croaking sinisterly, while the actual death and destruction is dished out by a multi-species alliance of alligators, spiders, turtles, birds and snakes.

Speaking of snakes, it would be remiss not to mention 1997's *Anaconda*, if only for Jon Voight chewing more scenery than the titular reptile chews people. Successful enough to spawn a host of DTV sequels, the angry snake has even taken on a murderous crocodile in last year's franchise crossover *Lake Placid vs Anaconda*.

Our gardens have also transformed into killing zones as plants turn against us in the likes of *The Day of the Triffids* (1962) and *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors* (1965), while M. Night Shyamalan's excruciating *The Happening* (2008) gave us suicidal thoughts.

Not all eco-horrors work well, of course. Irwin Allen's *The Swarm* (1978) set out to terrify audiences with its killer bees, but bored them instead. *The Giant Spider Invasion* (1975) traps you in a web of hilarity, rather than terror, with its titular over-sized arachnid, clearly a VW Beetle given a furry makeover.

Playing mind games

My favourite 'revolt of nature' flick doesn't actually feature any flesh-eating flora or fauna, though. Instead, Colin Eggleston's *Long Weekend* (1977) opts to eat away at the sanity of its human protagonists. The primary cause being the corpse of a sea cow, which washes up on the remote beach were the lead characters are staying and inexplicably creeps closer to their camp when nobody is looking.

All told, it's enough to make you paranoid about ever setting foot outside your house again, or owning pot plants. You're better off locked inside your movie den with some favourite films... ■

*Are you a fan of creature-features. What's your favourite?
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Anton van Beek has seen nature run amok so often in movies that he's paranoid about the way his cat keeps looking at him and licking its lips





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In The Mix

The evolution of colour spaces used in mastering and grading means consumers can struggle to keep up. And **Jon Thompson** says it doesn't help when TV brands get involved

I KEEP GETTING asked about P3 colour space and home cinema. There are short and long answers here. The short answer is that P3 has nothing to do with home cinema whatsoever, and it's wrong for manufacturers to even mention it. Domestic AV doesn't support the format. HDMI has flags for the REC.709 colour space, which is the colour target for HDTV, and flags for REC.2020, the colour space of the UHD/4K TV standard. P3 doesn't feature. So why mention it? Well, here's the long answer...

Setting an industry standard

To understand what P3 colour space is all about, you have to go back to the late 1990s, when Texas Instruments was looking to make its DLP Cinema technology the industry standard, with DLP projectors using a trio of DMDs, a prism block, three dichroic filters (red, green and blue), plus a xenon arc light source. The result of all this combined tech, with the colour response the dichroic filters could achieve, was what TI called D-Cinema spec or P3. It was a bigger colour space than REC.709, some 20 per cent bigger and beyond most of the colours of film print stock, except for really deep, dark cyans.

Technical people in Hollywood didn't want to use REC.709 as it was for TV and not cinema. So when the studios came together and created Digital Cinema Initiatives (more commonly known as DCI), it adopted P3 as the (minimum) colour space for a Digital Cinema projector (pictured), and it became known as DCI-P3. This for some time was the biggest colour space you could use in the real world, due to limitations of equipment being used to display and monitor images.

Ratified as an SMPTE standard, Hollywood made masters using a projector in DCI-P3 colour space. As it was bigger than REC.709, you could then

downconvert. As it sort of matched film you could also output it to film for archival use.

In post-production, we have gone one beyond that and use a system called ACES (Academy Color Encoding System), a whole workflow that keeps the image in a virtual colour space until you decide to output it to the real world. The real world has also moved on, with a new standard called REC.2020 (or to give it its full title, ITU-R Recommendation BT.2020), standardised on August 23, 2012.

This is where consumer manufacturers start to get it all wrong as High Dynamic Range (HDR) is actually defined as ITU-R Recommendation BT.2100. I have not seen a single display claiming to conform to REC.2100. And so far no consumer display comes anywhere close to REC.2020, either.

Back to the consumer world and the confusion with P3 and UHD Blu-rays. Yes, masters are graded in P3 colour space, but not mastered in P3. The master would be ACES (or XYZ, but that's an acronym too far for this column). This means they are colour space-independent, so can easily be output in any colour space, including REC.2020. UHD discs are all in REC.2020 and not P3 – all it means is it won't use the full scope of the container. If you calibrate your TV, it should be calibrated to REC.2020, not P3, as it will look wrong if you do. Shortly you will see films using a lot more of the REC.2020 container.

So I'm not sure why TV manufacturers or anyone else talking about UHD TVs should even mention P3 colour, other than it looks more impressive in its specification to achieve 95 per cent P3 colour rather than 68 per cent REC.2020. In the real world that point is irrelevant. Again, hype and marketing spin are interfering with solid science ■

*Do you find TV specifications confusing?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)



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DALI's Kubik One soundbar



THIS ISSUE WE'VE teamed up with speaker expert DALI to give away one of its high-spec, high-style Kubik One

soundbars – worth £800. In addition to this main prize, one runner-up will receive the award-winning DALI Katch wireless speaker (worth £330). So there's even more incentive to enter!

A soundbar with hi-fi heritage

The Kubik One is both a high-end TV/movie audio booster and a music maestro fit for your collection. A contemporary, eye-catching design (with red, black or white grilles to choose from as standard, plus additional colours available) is joined by exquisite build quality, with the rock-solid chassis hewn from a single piece of extruded aluminium.

Lurking within sit four separately powered drivers – two 1in dome tweeters and two 5.25in wood fibre mid/bass cones. Give the Kubik One a movie soundtrack or music file (connections include optical digital audio, aptX Bluetooth, stereo phono, USB and 3.5mm) and it delivers a premium performance, with an impressive power output and room-filling volume allied to a balanced, even-handed sound that's consistent throughout the dynamic range. The twin bass drivers provide slam and extension to thunderous film effects, while high-frequency details are clear and crisp. There's an expansive soundstage, too, courtesy of DALI's wide-dispersion drivers.

As well as sounding great, the Kubik One is also easy to use, with the 'bar automatically waking up when a signal is detected on any input, and IR learning meaning it can be controlled via your TV's own handset (a dedicated remote is also provided).

Meanwhile, our runner-up prize, DALI's Katch Bluetooth speaker, is the newest addition to the company's extensive range. Truly portable via a 24-hour rechargeable battery and leather carry strap, it partners a pair of tweeters and 3.5in midbass drivers to conjure a rich, punchy sound from a stylish design.

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'DALI's super-stylish Kubik One soundbar delivers a premium performance with movies and music'

Be in with a chance of winning a DALI Kubik One soundbar or DALI Katch speaker by answering the following film-related question:

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A) JOHN SINGLETON B) WILLIAM FRIEDKIN C) WALTER HILL

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THE CLOSING DATE for this competition is January 1, 2017. Please read the terms and conditions (opposite) before sending in your entry.

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1. The first entries drawn at random will win the prizes. **2.** Only one entry per person/household; multiple entries will be discarded. **3.** Entrants from the UK only. **4.** Employees of MyTimeMedia Ltd and companies supplying competition prizes are not eligible to enter this competition. **5.** Please ensure your personal details are correct, as they will be used to contact you if you win. **6.** No alternatives, cash or otherwise, will be offered to the winners as prizes. **7.** The editor's decision is final. **8.** Comp winners' info available upon request. **9.** The closing date for entries is January 1, 2017.



'I don't want 1975 to look shot

As Arrow Films celebrates 25 years of cult success, HCC's Anton van Beek sits down with **James White** – Head of Technical and Restoration Services – to talk 4K, film vs digital and the hunt for the original 35mm elements of *Donnie Darko*



James White: Arrow Films' restoration guru

We last chatted over three years ago. Since then you've gone to work for Arrow full-time...

It's been great. As you know Arrow has now expanded into the US as well, so that's been an interesting transition.

Becoming a US label has had a knock-on effect on the work I do simply by increasing the number of titles that we restore in any given period. Our output each month has doubled in size and we're looking to increase that as we go.

Have there been any big shifts in digital restoration in that time?

I guess the biggest shift has been the focus on 4K. In previous years we would have been satisfied to work in 2K throughout because we never really had any plans for anything beyond the Blu-ray, the DVD, that sort of thing. Now, the costs of working in 4K have come down and working in this resolution has become the industry standard.

Now, not every project merits working at this level but it's particularly important if you're restoring a film from the original negative. If you're sourcing from this element then you want to make sure that you capture every possible bit of information from that material as a starting point. If you're going to limit the scanning process to 2K resolution then you're already limiting what can be accomplished afterwards in the digital realm.

Also, I come from an archival background, so I'm keen to make sure that any unique and irreplaceable element, such as the original negative, doesn't need to be accessed and removed from vault storage again in the near future. Access to these precious materials is a privilege, so it's important to work with the mindset of what's best for their long-term survival.

On a related note, working in 4K gives us the benefit of being ready to release titles on UHD if and when we decide to do so. A lot of our titles could work in this format quite easily, and would likely look fantastic, given that it's the primary standard we've already restored them to. As with



a film from like it was yesterday...!

everything, though, the costs involved in releasing titles on UHD are considerable, so it's no surprise that we haven't seen an independent label go that route yet. I think we're all sort of watching each other to see who's going to stick their toe out first.

I presume you've been keeping an eye on streaming, too?

You certainly can't ignore these things, that's for sure. Increasingly, our titles are being made available in VOD/SVOD on various websites and platforms, so we've had to make sure that all of our titles migrate to these new delivery systems in the best quality possible.

My preferred delivery format for our films is still a great Blu-ray though, expertly encoded to give the feature the best presentation possible, featuring a set of new and interesting extras, artistically packaged with striking artwork, and including a solid booklet, curated and produced with a real depth of knowledge and respect for the film. But I understand that for a lot of people, that's

not how they're getting their cinema these days. So we want to be able to reach these people as well.

Is restoring onto film for archiving still the best preservation method in your opinion?

In an ideal world any restoration would be preserved in two different ways – digitally and photochemically. Digitally, this means backing up the full-resolution restored files onto LTO, which is an archival form of digital tape. Photochemically, it means recording out a new Digital Intermediate (DI) as a physical manifestation of the restored data, because history has proven that there is no better archival format than celluloid. Preserved in the correct climate and temperature-controlled conditions, there's no reason that film can't last for years and years to come.

Unfortunately, the costs of preserving restored films in this way is substantial, so aside from the big studios and some of the bigger archives like the BFI, very few



Too Late for Tears (top) and Woman on the Run – film noirs released under the Arrow Academy label



A follow up to this year's American Horror Project boxset is in the pipeline



companies actually do it, which means that the vast majority of digital restorations are only preserved as digital files, which should be a cause of some concern. After all, digital technology is in constant flux, as we're always having to migrate our data from one system to another.

This issue came up recently during our restoration of *Donnie Darko*, which we restored in 4K in both the Theatrical and Director's Cut versions. The original camera negative served as the primary source element for the majority of the film, but a number of optical and/or special effects shots created specifically for the Director's Cut had originally been produced digitally and these original files hadn't been preserved. So we came to rely on the first-generation DI elements made from these files, which thankfully had been retained.

The Arrow Academy imprint has opened more avenues of films for you to work on...

The Academy strand has been going strong for a while now, and it began as a way for us to broaden our scope outside the cult/horror focus we were probably originally best known for. My Arrow colleagues and I are fans of all kinds of cinema, so our titles were never going to fit all in one box!

What I appreciate about it is the fact that we haven't really given Academy a formal definition, as we've released a lot of different titles under the imprint. Over the past year we've released great foreign titles like *Closely Observed Trains*, *The Human Condition*, classic cinema titles like *My Darling Clementine* and *Thieves' Highway*, as well as boxsets for auteurs like Kiju Yoshida, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Krzysztof Kieslowski and Jacques Rivette. I think that rundown itself illustrates how far Arrow has expanded as a label in a fairly short time.

It's certainly boosted the number of film noirs available on BD over here...

Well, we're all fans of film noir at Arrow. We'd love to do many more! A couple of personal favourites we released this past year were a pair of under-appreciated but really wonderful noirs, *Woman on the Run* and *Too Late for Tears*. I'd never seen either of the films before, so it was

great to have a suitable platform to shine a light on these little-known gems.

With regards to licensing, if you restore something, does that restoration become the property of the company you licensed from for them to use as they wish?

It really depends on what our contract with the licensor stipulates. We'd prefer to retain exclusivity of our restorations whenever possible, or for at least a limited time, considering the expense involved. That's not always possible, and our primary aim when we restore any title is to do justice to the film and give it the best release.

It's more common these days for us to seek out a collaborative arrangement with another label, in which we share costs but benefit equally. We've worked with Criterion in this way on a few titles, and we recently worked with Shout Factory! on *To Live and Die in L.A.* We oversaw a new 4K restoration from the original camera negative, working closely with director William Friedkin. Shout Factory! contributed towards the cost of the restoration and produced a number of new extras which will feature on both of our releases.

So this arrangement worked to benefit both labels, and now customers in both territories can enjoy the same definitive release of this fantastic flick.

The past few years have seen a proliferation of indie labels in the UK. Are they following a path that Arrow laid the groundwork for?

I think in some cases it's pretty clear that we've had an influence on some of these labels, naming no names (imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, after all!). We've certainly been influenced by other labels ourselves, Criterion being the most obvious. But the fact that quality labels like Eureka/Masters of Cinema [MOC] and Second Run, as well as new ones like Signal One, Indicator/Powerhouse and 88 Films, continue to thrive in this business is great news for all true fans of cinema.

There's been some criticism about Arrow moving away from its roots as a horror label. Was the release of slashers like *Satan's Blade* an attempt to get back to the label's origins?

I don't really see the rationale behind the argument. We're certainly releasing more titles than we used to but I expect the number of horror titles we're currently releasing is about the same number as it ever was. I mean, in the past year alone, we released newly-restored editions of *Blood Rage*, *The Mutilator*, *Satan's Blade*, *Bride of Re-Animator* and *The Hills Have Eyes*. Giallo-wise, we released new and exclusive restorations of *Deep Red*, *Your Vice is a Locked Room* and *Only I Have the Key*, *The Black Cat*, *What Have You Done to Solange?*, *Death Walks on High Heels*, *Death Walks at Midnight*, *The Bloodstained Butterfly* and others. At the same time we've released horror/cult hybrids like *Dead End Drive-In*, *Microwave Massacre*, *Slugs* and *Blood Bath*. Not to mention the fact that we restored the majority of Herschel Gordon Lewis's films this year. So all in all, I think horror fans have a lot to be happy about this year from Arrow. And next year should be even more exciting, as there's some big plans in the works...

Coming soon to hi-def

Arrow Blu-rays to look out for in the next few months

Arrow Video

05/12: Cohen & Tate
12/12: *Donnie Darko: Limited Edition*
19/12: *Hellgate*
19/12: *Hell Comes to Frogtown*
19/12: *The Burning*
19/12: *The Guyver*
09/01: *Donnie Darko*
16/01: *Miike Takashi's Black Society Trilogy*
23/01: *Blood Rage*

23/07: *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia: Limited Edition*
30/01: *Raising Cain*
06/02: *Willie Dynamite*
13/02: *Tower of London*
13/02: *We are the Flesh*
20/02: *Wolf Guy*
27/02: *Pulse*

Arrow Academy

12/12: *Woody Allen: Six Films – 1979 to 1985 Boxset*

12/12: *Stardust Memories*
12/12: *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*
12/12: *Zelig*
09/01: *Broadway Danny Rose*
09/01: *The Purple Rose of Cairo*
20/02: *Woody Allen: Six Films – 1986 to 1991 Boxset*
20/02: *Hannah and Her Sisters*
27/02: *My Darling Clementine*



Anyway, we at Arrow are big fans of all kinds of cinema, and the horror/cult genres will continue to be a big part of what we do as a label.

Is work underway on a second *American Horror Project* collection?

Absolutely, we're currently finalising what titles will appear on *AHP Volume 2*, and are already thinking about further volumes. This series began as a shared vision between Arrow and Stephen Thrower (author of *Nightmare USA*), and the plan is to continue working on these projects together and releasing new volumes for as long as we can.

There are still some areas that Arrow hasn't dipped its toes into, such as silent films...

Indeed, Arrow's never done a silent film, but I know many of us would certainly like to. The last silent project I worked as a restoration supervisor on was the Eureka/MOC release of Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and I'd jump at the chance to work on one again.

Another untapped market would be animation. Something like *Fritz the Cat* could fit in very well...

Sure. In fact, I'd be up for doing all the Ralph Bakshi films, provided licensing and materials were available. Why not? We all have our own little wish lists. A few years ago I was pushing for us to license and restore James Toback's debut film *Fingers* (1978). It's a great film and an absolutely key title in Harvey Keitel's filmography, and it was remade to great acclaim as *The Beat My Heart Skipped*. I contacted Toback who was enthusiastic about the project, but we hit a brick wall with licensing once we discovered the film had been sold years ago as part of a package of independent films to Warner Brothers. So that little dream project of mine remains unfulfilled.

Do you think that Criterion's recent release of *Cat People*, licensed from Warner Bros., indicates a softening of the stance on these things at that particular studio?

Possibly. Previously, the only Warner film they had released was *Badlands* and that was, as I understand it, really down to director Terence Malick insisting on working with Criterion because of his relationship with them. But as well as *Cat People*, they've just released *McCabe & Mrs Miller*, and I understand more Warner Brothers titles are in the pipeline with them.

It's been interesting to me that with every time we make technical progress and migrate from one home video format to another, the quality improves but as a consequence, the number of available titles decreases. I mean, VHS enjoyed over 20 years as the standard home delivery format. Now I don't mean to say that during that time VHS released everything that had ever been produced on film – far from it – but that by the time the format had run its course it had covered significant cinematic ground. It certainly covered a wider spectrum than DVD has, and there's no question that Blu-ray, as much as I love the format, has only released a fraction of the titles DVD did.



Blood Feast on Blu-ray was presented in both 1.33:1 and 1.85:1 ratios

So it seems that with each upgrade in quality, the fewer films we actually have available to see. One only has to look at the output of a label like Warner Brothers,

which released many of its lesser-known

but deserving genre titles, either as standalone releases or more often in boxsets, during the DVD era, but has reserved the Blu-ray format for only its top classic titles, or migrated them to a speciality limited mail-order model. I think it's crazy that a film like *The Big Sleep* isn't given a banner release it deserves, but I could argue the same for any number of films from its catalogue. Which is, of course, why I think it's so important that it allows for more sub-licensing to smaller labels like us.

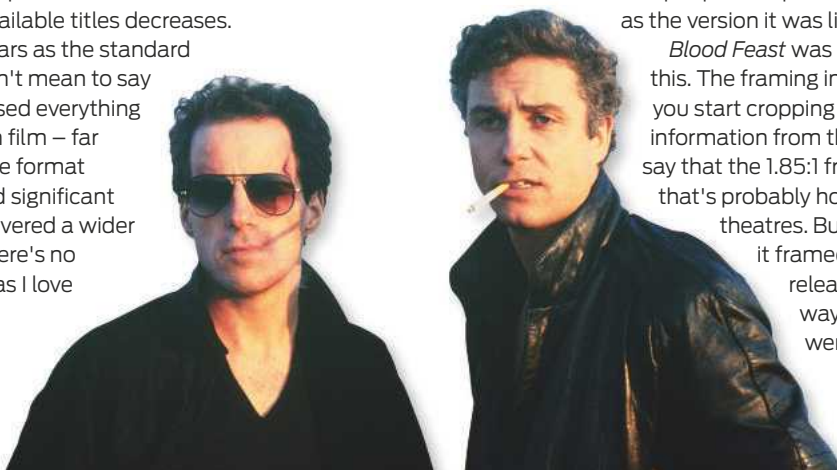
At the same time, as the formats become more and more specialised, there's a danger in them becoming something to be enjoyed only by the select few who can afford it. And that's not healthy for film restoration. After all, it's best for the legacy of any film for as many people to be exposed to it as possible. This is the reason why I haven't been able to muster too much enthusiasm about Ultra HD. At the moment it just feels a bit like a luxury format in which only those few classic titles that are 'worthy' of the treatment will see the light. That doesn't interest me very much. That said, I'd welcome the opportunity for us to release titles on UHD and be the exception to the rule.

Let's talk framing. On the recent Herschell Gordon Lewis set, you provided both 1.33:1 and 1.85:1 for specific films. Why?

We looked at it this way – most people had seen these films primarily on VHS or DVD, and the previous generation would have seen them shown at midnight screenings or wherever. So we felt there was a legitimate reason, when we could, to present the films in both formats; the version that most people had probably seen the films in, as well as the version it was likely originally released in.

Blood Feast was probably the best example of this. The framing in that film is so tight that once you start cropping for 1.85:1 you lose so much information from the frame. Now that's not to say that the 1.85:1 framing is incorrect. Historically, that's probably how a lot of people saw it in theatres. But many people have seen it framed in 4:3, as the old VHS releases presented the films in this way. The majority of Lewis's films were produced open matte, so

James White worked on the new 4K restoration of '80s cult classic *To Live and Die in L.A.*



they could be masked in either ratio. Or, if you wanted to, you could slap a 2.35:1 mask on *Blood Feast* and make it look like a Sergio Leone film. Sort of.

It's not all that different than when I was at Eureka and the decision was taken to present Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* in both the 1.33:1 and 1.85:1 ratios on the Masters Of Cinema Blu-ray release. We justified this decision because so many people had seen the film on VHS or on television over the years in the full-frame ratio and Welles had obviously filmed it to work in either format. So Orson Welles and Herschell Gordon Lewis share at least one trait I guess!

That Herschell Gordon Lewis set must have been a lot of work...

I don't think I've ever been involved in a project quite as complicated and extensive. For me, it was a project that really illustrated the fragile nature of film as a medium.

The original negatives survived for only a handful of the films, the rest had been lost years ago. *Blood Feast*, for example, looks better than I ever thought possible, and that's down to the original negative having survived intact. *Scum of the Earth*, *Color Me Blood Red* and *She-Devils on Wheels*, for example, these all look very good as well.

A *Taste of Blood* is one where three-quarters of the neg had survived, but a fairly worn print had to be sourced for the missing sections. On the other end of the spectrum you have a film like *Moonshine Mountain*, which had to be strung together from three separate prints and an old video master to make up the missing sections, and all were in fairly appalling condition.

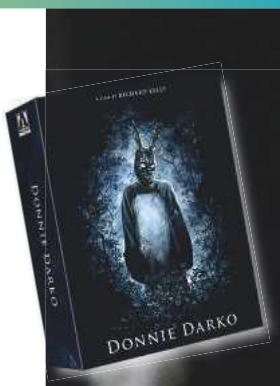
We restored each of the films as best we could with the materials still in existence, but the rough and tumble histories of these titles demanded we give them a naturalistic, warts-and-all presentation. They've been restored as much as they practically could be, which in a way seems fitting for these films. I've spoken before about the limits of what restoration can achieve (in particular on our *Nightmare City* release), and I think this is a textbook example of that. Try as you might, you can't completely erase the ravages of history.

What releases from other labels have really impressed you this year?

The BFI's Alan Clarke *Dissent and Disruption* boxset takes the prize for me. I know the extent of the work that went into it by all involved, and the licensing alone had to be a nightmare. From someone who came to Clarke fairly late and had only heard about the breadth of his work outside *Scum*, *The Firm*, *Made in Britain*, *Elephant*, etc, this set has been truly revelatory.

Is the standard of restoration and the presentation of catalogue films on Blu-ray getting better?

Definitely. The proliferation of knowledge online has made people more aware of some of the issues we face, and how older films should be properly presented. The said, I think there are still a few areas of misunderstanding out there. There's an expectation by some that a film should be something to show off your new high-end home theatre or something – which is fine, but films from previous eras shouldn't really be technically manipulated to fit some modern paradigm of what cinema should look like on a new digital platform.



When we talk about restoration, I don't think we can replicate that original theatrical experience with 100 per cent accuracy, or if that should even be the goal. The process of restoring a film digitally is not the same process that went into making a 35mm print when the film was first released. In general terms, we're working to produce something better; we're working from the original source element at a very high resolution without any degree of generational loss. Is that an accurate representation of the film? It depends on what your expectations are. People remark, 'Well, that's not how I remember the film looking when I saw it back in 1978,' or whatever. It's all so subjective. What do your eyes see that my eyes don't see?

One of the great pleasures of restoration is involving the original talent. In most cases you'll find that all they want to do is restore the film just as it originally looked, but there are occasions in which the filmmaker might seize upon the opportunity to significantly revise their film, perhaps in a misguided attempt to make it more relevant to modern viewers. It's a danger that needs to be carefully managed, because my responsibility, first and foremost, is to the legacy of the film, not the changing fashions of what cinema looks like.

I don't want a film that was released in 1975 to look like it was shot yesterday. Frankly, I can't understand why anyone would!

It's a tricky thing. When I said to my editor that you were working on *Driller Killer*, he was less than enthusiastic about what could possibly be achieved with that film...

Well, we restored *Driller Killer* from the 16mm negative in 4K – something that probably nobody would have considered doing before. But we did it, in part because we

Arrow's forthcoming *Donnie Darko* Blu-ray release is the first time the original negative has been used for an HD master

The Crazies is one of two George Romero releases on the way in 2017



Abel Ferrara's *Driller Killer*: shot on 16mm, now scanned at 4K





love director Abel Ferrara but also because we wanted to give this controversial, much loved and loathed film the restoration we felt it deserved. Ferrara and his cinematographer Ken Kelsch both participated in the project, and I think they were both pleasantly surprised at how good it now looks. I've got a lot of fondness for the film myself, particularly as a cultural artefact of pre-Rudy Giuliani 'No Wave' New York era. So many of the locations are now almost unrecognisable! The drill effects are also still very good, and now more vivid than ever...

And you have a couple more George Romero projects on the go...

Yeah, we're restoring *The Crazies* and *Season of the Witch*, both in 4K from the original elements, which we had to search for. With *Season of the Witch* we'd almost given up hope on finding a decent element, but just recently one of our collaborators in the States located the original 16mm negative, almost as a fluke. So I'm very pleased about that as it's a film in Romero's canon that's never enjoyed a decent presentation on video before.

On a related note, I have to confess I'm slightly disappointed that we're not restoring *Night of the Living Dead*, which I had always hoped we'd do. That said, it's being restored by Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation, so I'm happy that at least it's going to be done well!

Can you tell us a bit more about your upcoming *Donnie Darko* Blu-ray?

We've restored *Donnie Darko* in both the Theatrical and Director's cuts in 4K, sourced from the original camera negative. We worked directly with director Richard Kelly and his director of photography [DOP] Steven Poster. It's kind of a unique project for me, because it's a much more recent film than I would normally work on, but it's presented a few new challenges along the way.

When the film was released in 2000 and it proved such a sleeper hit, there was a rush to re-release it a few months later in a Director's Cut version. To accomplish that, the negative was re-assembled and new bits were added here and there, after which these elements had been split up and archived separately. Locating all the parts we needed took some extensive searching, and once they were located, reassembling the two versions from all these pieces wasn't exactly straightforward.

Fortunately, both the director and DOP were very helpful throughout. There were a couple of sections in the Director's Cut that Richard Kelly was never completely happy with because he felt rushed by the distributor to finish the film at the time – so this project provided him the opportunity to revisit these sections and achieve the look he wanted for them, finally, without altering anything substantial.

So fans of the film are in for a bit of a surprise?

The main thing is that none of the previous video releases of *Donnie Darko* were made from the negative. They weren't restored. They were graded incorrectly. So Richard Kelly and Steven Poster were instrumental in making this restoration definitive – they both treasure the film and wanted it to be as good as it possibly could be for this release, and I'm thrilled with the results.

How do you feel about being a famous name for Blu-ray geeks?

I'm not sure that I am, but I would argue that nothing I do is all that special. I'm not the artist that made this amazing film that has stood the test of time and that people want to see decades later. In a sense my job is simply to dust the artefacts of age off from these great works of cinema and do my part to help introduce them to a new generation of viewers.

And I'm certainly not doing it alone – I work closely with extremely talented restoration technicians and artists to make these projects happen. And I have to mention my good friend and colleague [Blu-ray encoder] David Mackenzie, who provides world-class encodes for anything we restore.

Finally, do you have a proudest achievement among the projects you've worked on for Arrow?

There are some films that have been benchmarks for me because I'm still thrilled that I got to participate on them. *To Live and Die in L.A.* has been a recent favourite. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is another one, one of my favourite films of the 1970s and arguably Sam Peckinpah's last true masterpiece.

Withnail and I was a real highlight. To work on a film that's become essentially the definition of a cult British classic and to work closely with the cinematographer to get it to look like it was always intended was a great experience. It took far longer and proved far more complicated than I expected, but it was so worth it.

The Long Good Friday was amazing, too. As was *Time Bandits*. The Walerian Borowczyk collection for sure. *Blood and Black Lace* and *Black Sabbath*. *The Fury* too. And how can I leave out *Zombie Flesh Eaters*? I just feel very privileged that I'm able to work on so many great films, those I already love and those I've yet to discover ■

'Working on *Withnail and I* was a real highlight'



Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

Motion concerns

Hi. I hope you can help. I have a £3,000 budget for a 65in or bigger HDR/Ultra HD TV to replace my trusty, but old, Panasonic Viera plasma.

I have been an avid reader of your magazine for a couple of years now and this has enabled me to keep up to date with the latest technology.

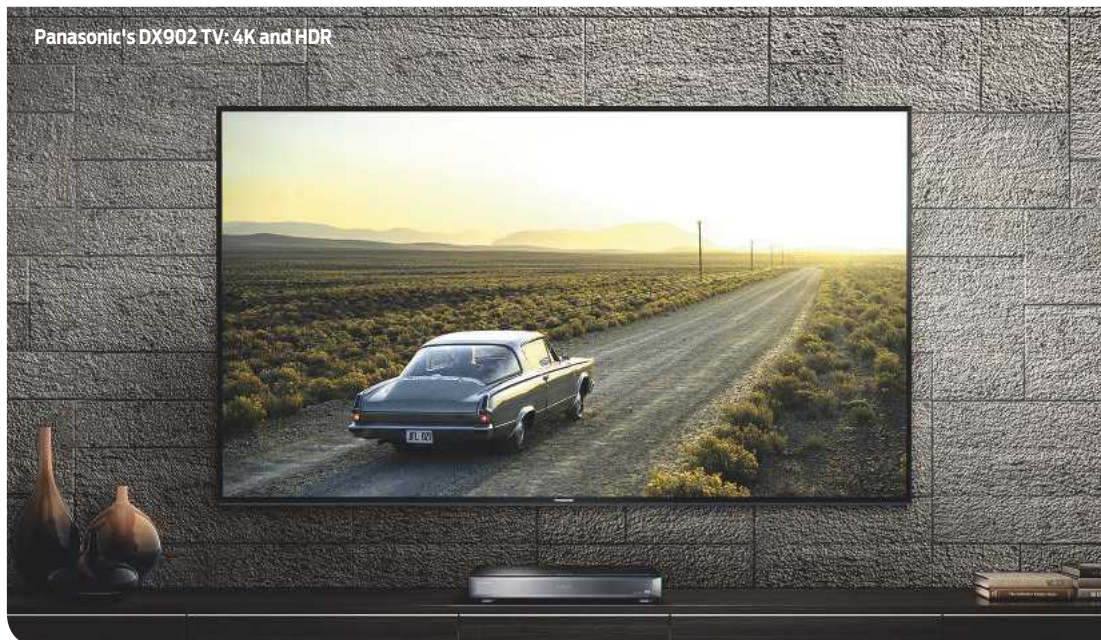
Our viewing is predominantly sport-related and it is imperative that our new TV is able to deal with fast-moving images, particularly during football matches, etc.

I was almost sold on the Panasonic TX-65DX902, which you reviewed in *HCC* #259. However, I have since read that it struggles with very fast-moving images such as football with some banding and blurring evident.

So in effect I am now back to square one. Any help or advice you could give me to enable me to make an informed choice would be appreciated, and thanks for the great magazine.

Jim Livingstone

John Archer replies: Really no current TVs are quite as natural with motion as the old



Panasonic plasmas were. But obviously today's best TVs outperform plasma displays in other key ways (4K being one of them).

The DX902 can leave fast motion looking rather blurred, even when using its motion

processing systems. It's not a poor performer in this regard, just not quite spot on.

Given your background, I think you might find LG's OLED TVs give you the most all-round pleasing images. These are

You lot are Senseless!

Another top 10 list in your mag that misses out on key titles. While I thought your Ghost Stories roundup [*HCC* #266] had a good mix of movies, you chose to leave out *The Sixth Sense* in favour of *The Others*. *The Sixth Sense* was a huge hit at the time thanks to its shock ending and was also genuinely tense and scary. *The Others* was good, but not great.

As for *The Blair Witch Project*, I wouldn't watch that film on Blu-ray if you paid me! Keep up the good work, though.

Terry Mann

Anton van Beek replies: Sorry, Terry, but Team HCC is just more of a fan of *The Others* than the M. Night Shyamalan/Bruce Willis chiller. But we can't argue with personal opinion.

We'll endeavour to keep aiming for a 'good mix' in our *Collecting...* lists, and always welcome a disagreement!



One of these chaps may not be alive...

unbeatable for contrast, and their motion playback with 50/60Hz content is good. In particular, there's no 'dirty screen effect'. For your budget you could get the LG OLED65B6, which meets your 65in screen, HDR and native 4K requirements. Note, however, that this screen doesn't support 3D, and its HDR impact is somewhat less powerful than on the Panasonic due to a lack of native brightness.

Sony typically produces the best LCD TV motion performance. However, the only 2016 Sony models I feel comfortable recommending are the 75-inch KD-75XD9405, and the KD-65ZD9 [see p40]. The first of these is 10 inches bigger than you want, and costs £4,000, while the (amazing) 65ZD9 also breaks your budget at the same price.

A final alternative would be Samsung's UE65KS9500. This is now appearing online for less than £3,000, and delivers excellent picture quality. There's slight judder in its native motion, but motion processing is reasonably effective after a little tweaking via its 'Custom' motion options. Like the LG OLED65B6, this isn't 3D-capable either.

If you're preparing to spend this much, try and find a specialist retailer who can give you demo time, so you can assess the DX902's motion first-hand, and that of other TVs.

VHS memories

Hi. I loved Martin Pipe's article on the history of VHS in the last issue [HCC #266]. I rented my first VCR from Multibroadcast in 1980; as a working teenager the £40-per-month rental was a struggle but the kudos I earned from friends was incredible – 'Oh, have you got a video?'

I remember it had a corded remote control, and a feature called audio dub which was essentially a gimmick.

Regarding Philips VCRs, there was a model called the N1700 which came after the N1500. This was co-produced with Grundig but neither manufacturers' tapes would play in each others' machines – can you imagine that happening now? Lastly, regarding the best system – Philips' Video 2000 format – I had the VR2024 which had flipover tapes, extended play (16 hours possible on one tape) and dynamic track following, and it and the fellow Grundig machines looked fantastic.
Dave, Watford

Mark Craven replies: Glad you enjoyed the article, Dave. It certainly brought back memories. What I find odd is that I was still renting a VCR in 1998 (when I was a student) – it shows just how long the VHS format managed to hold on and how the rental business wasn't a flash in the pan.

I've written in the past that the hardware rental model would actually make a nice fit in these times of continually changing TV and video delivery standards. The option of

★ Star Letter...

No HDR via HDMI on my LG 4K!

Hi. As an avid follower of all things home cinema I like to keep up to date with the latest advances.

I have an LG 65UF860V TV and recently bought a Samsung 4K Blu-ray player. Going through the setup on the player I selected all the settings required to suite my needs and settled back to enjoy the film. Having looked into the reviews and setup suggestions for the LG TV, I found that when viewing a series on Amazon with HDR playback a message appears on the screen saying 'HDR is on'.

However, when playing a 4K disc in the Blu-ray deck, no such message appears.

I contacted LG and their reply was that this is correct, the HDMI sockets are not HDR enabled. Once again a new media format appears and once again manufacturers seem totally reluctant to work together to make the format work for the consumer.

So now I have a player capable of outputting HDR (supposed to give the best quality picture) and a TV with 'Ultra Luminance' (also supposed to give the best quality picture). Can somebody please tell me what my TV is taking in and what is it giving out on the screen?

Tim Wardlaw

Mark Craven replies: Hi Tim. Unfortunately, you've fallen foul of a curious quirk that affected some of LG's 2015 4K sets – namely that they are HDR capable, but only

from internal – e.g. streamed – sources. This is because the HDMI inputs are not v2.0a for HDR passthrough.

This explains why you are able to view Amazon's HDR content via the TV's own Amazon Video app (and the onscreen message you're getting suggests it's working correctly) but are drawing an HDR blank with the Ultra HD Blu-rays you're inputting from your Samsung player. The TV's HDMI 2.0 inputs support HDCP 2.2, so are therefore compatible with 4K sources – UHD Blu-ray, Sky Q, a new games console – but not HDR. What you are seeing is an SDR down-conversion of the HDR disc.

When I spoke with LG last Summer about this very issue afflicting some of its OLED models, I was told that an HDMI 2.0a update would be possible, but I do not know if that was applicable to the LED models (like your UF860V). And even if it was, it certainly doesn't seem to have been implemented.

We hope that Star Letter-writer Tim isn't scared of the dark, as we'll be sending him the acclaimed fright-flick *Lights Out* on Blu-ray. This terrifying film follows a family plagued by a supernatural entity that only manifests whenever the lights are turned off – just the thing to watch in a blacked-out movie den. *Lights Out* is available to own on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital Download from December 12, courtesy of Warner Bros. Home Entertainment.



returning your year-old screen when you decide you want one an improved one would be very handy, rather than having to either live with it or try to sell second-hand and purchase a brand-new model. However, this doesn't seem likely to happen, and I can't see myself pitching it in on *Dragon's Den*.

Big price gaps are the norm

Regarding Mark Craven's column about price differences between the US and the UK [Digital Copy, HCC #266], I expect that Brexit, or more accurately the falling value of sterling, is only going to make this situation worse. I've already heard of some AV companies having to raise prices of UK products, and the new Apple MacBook Pro has had its price increased because of our weaker currency. So I imagine that big price gaps between here and in the US are going to carry on being the norm. Luckily I'm not looking to upgrade my system at the moment!
Steve, Edinburgh

Mark Craven replies: I have noticed price increases within the AV world, more often from brands who simply don't have the massive economies of scale to absorb any currency differences for a continued length of time. For instance, Onkyo has been very honest about increased pricing for some of its all-in-one packages 'due to post-Brexit currency shifts'. I wouldn't want to guess what the future holds. Hopefully we won't suffer further price hikes next year.

Where's my Sony amp gone?

I have a simple question: how to get answers out of Sony?

Trying to make contact via the web makes BT's customer service look five-star. Try to contact sales and if you are lucky you will be told they are 'technical' and refer you to a Sony Centre, and 'no' they cannot direct to sales. Sony Centres can't help.

Good old-fashioned letters to Sony UK HQ don't even get an acknowledgement. >



And if that is not enough they then send out an email asking for details of my experience with customer service!

So what do I want to know?

At CES 2016 they announced a Glass Sound Speaker. Their UK news section of the website advised it was to be available late Spring. Where is it, how much and where can I hear it?

Also, the STR-ZA5000ES AV receiver. The paper spec on this looks like it would knock a lot of your existing top-rated items

out of the park. It includes Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, and the US price is \$2,800, so not over the top for a custom install unit.

Will it be coming to UK/Europe? When, what price and where can I experience it? Or failing all that where can I find a 240V version?

I hope you can help as I am looking to upgrade my existing Sony STR-DA5800ES to give me more speaker options without the loss of the other features including the Ethernet switch.

Cliff

Mark Craven replies: First, the Glass Sound Speaker (pictured above). After previewing at CES this also got a second showing at the IFA



Sony's STR-ZA5000ES: missing in action

tech show in September and has finally arrived in the UK – you can buy it via Sony's website for £800. It's certainly a show-stopping piece of sonic gear, but is definitely more designer boudoir than AV den.

The STR-ZA5000ES is perhaps of more interest to home cinema enthusiasts, as it's a nine-channel Atmos/DTS:X AV receiver with 4K/HDR support and, as you point out, that Ethernet switch (in eight-port guise), which we certainly appreciated on previous top-line Sony models.

Now, the STR-ZA5000ES remains a no-show fully a year after it was first announced. I asked why and was told: 'Sony

decided not to range that particular model in the UK.'

So if you want to upgrade your existing Sony AV receiver, you will have to look to other brands, and give up on that desired Ethernet switching feature. As far as I can gather, there are no 240V/50Hz variants available ■

Contact us...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

Just email your answer to Competitions@homecinemachoice.com to be in with a chance to win



Assault on Precinct 13

John Carpenter's classic action-thriller turns 40 this year, and Second Sight will be marking the occasion on November 28 with new limited-edition Blu-ray boxset and DVD releases of the film. To celebrate we've got five of the Blu-ray sets to give away!

Question:

Director John Carpenter had a smash hit with which of these classic slasher films?

Answer:

- A) Halloween B) Black Christmas
C) Friday the 13th

Email your answer with 'Precinct 13' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



Outcast: Season One

The Walking Dead creator Robert Kirkman has come up with another terrifying treat for fright fans with this new TV series about a young man battling demons. *Outcast: Season One* is available to buy on Blu-ray and DVD from December 12 and thanks to Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment we've got five BDs up for grabs!

Question:

Outcast star Philip Glenister played Gene Hunt in the hit BBC TV show *Life on...*

Answer:

- A) ...Mars B) ...Mercury C) ...Uranus

Email your answer with 'Outcast: Season One' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



Star Trek Beyond

Get ready to boldly go where no one has gone before with this latest instalment in the hit science-fiction film series. *Star Trek Beyond* is now available to own on

DVD, Blu-ray, 3D Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution and Universal Pictures UK – and we've got five Blu-rays to be won!

Question:

Who created the original *Star Trek* TV series?

Answer:

- A) Gene Simmons B) Gene Roddenberry
C) Gene Wilder

Email your answer with 'Star Trek Beyond' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!

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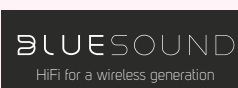


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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **GHOSTBUSTERS** HCC ain't afraid of no reboot! **THE BFG 3D** Phizz-whizzing fun or a home cinema trogglehumper? **JASON BOURNE** Action flick aims high with its explosive DTS:X audio **THE SHALLOWS** A hi-def platter with plenty of bite **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE 3D** Vintage sci-fi flick gets an eye-popping Blu-ray & MORE!

Strange new worlds...

Star Trek Beyond 3D → Paramount/Universal Pictures → All-region BD

Fast & Furious director Justin Lin sets out to take the popular sci-fi series where no *Star Trek* film has gone before in this action-packed sequel. Check out our Blu-ray review on p98 to find out if he succeeds

HCC RATINGS KEY...	
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



An army of ghosts is nothing compared to taking on angry online trolls



Ghoul power meets girl power

Surprisingly enjoyable blockbuster remake has just what it takes to reanimate a dead franchise



→ GHOSTBUSTERS: EXTENDED EDITION

Director Paul Feig faced an uphill struggle with this remake of *Ghostbusters*. Firstly, the 1984 original holds a special place in the hearts of an entire generation of film-goers (ranking alongside *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Back to the Future* as one of the most beloved films of the decade). Secondly, the decision to cast four women in the lead roles also brought out the very worst in the army of sexist trolls lurking on the internet.

Still, the idea of giving *Ghostbusters* a do-over is actually a pretty sound one. As much as audiences loved the original, every attempt at recapturing its special blend of cinematic magic, be it through imitations or the official 1989 sequel, fell well short of the mark. Could a reboot be any worse?

As it happens, no. Despite a slightly sluggish opening act, an over-reliance on flashy CG effects, plus a few too many nods and winks to the first film (not least the parade of tedious cameos from members of the original cast), this new *Ghostbusters* is good fun. Most of the credit for this belongs to the four female stars. Melissa McCarthy, Kristen Wiig, Leslie Jones and Kate McKinnon prove to be every bit as comfortable with a proton pack as they are riffing off one another. The relatively unknown McKinnon really steals the show, with her eccentric and impish

mad-scientist performance giving the film a sense of freewheeling spontaneity that you don't often see in a such a meticulously constructed VFX blockbuster.

So, even if it never really escapes the shadow of the original, this enjoyable reboot left us eager to see this quartet return for further ghoulish adventures. Mission accomplished, then.

Picture: *Ghostbusters* makes a splash on Blu-ray with a colourful 1080p encode. The palette runs pretty hot throughout, giving flesh tones a warm look and ensuring that the brightly-coloured spectres seem to pop off the screen – in fact, quite a lot of the film's VFX actually exceed the limits of the 2.40:1 framing, which gets a bit distracting. Also, an IMAX sequence in Chapter 15 sees the aspect ratio shift to 1.78:1 for a while.

Audio: The movie's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix serves up plenty of audio mayhem, making exuberant use of the entire soundstage and deploying some serious amounts of bass. All told, it's an extremely effective mix, but the fact that a Dolby Atmos version is

included on *Ghostbusters*' 4K release does make it second best.

Extras: As well as two different cuts of the film, this double-disc set is loaded with bonus goodies. Highlights include a pair of commentary tracks; a mammoth 85 minutes of extended/alternate scenes; and featurettes exploring the film's ghosts and visual effects.



Somebody should really tell these ghosts to stay inside the film's 2.40:1 framing...

HCC VERDICT

Ghostbusters: Extended Edition

→ Sony Pictures → All-region BD → £25

WE SAY: This fun female-led remake scares up colourful visuals, spooky sonics and loads of bonus bits

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

The Secret Life of Pets

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25



There's a good idea at the heart of this latest computer-animated flick from the brains behind *Despicable Me*, but *The Secret Life of Pets* never really hits the mark and ends up feeling like a flashy update of those generic 'toons Disney used to clog up cinemas with in the 1980s. Still, little 'uns will surely love the noisy action and poo jokes, while home cinema-owning parents can take solace in this Blu-ray's flawless Full HD imagery and expansive Dolby Atmos soundscape. Best of the disc's array of child-friendly extras is a trio of animated shorts.



The Night Of

HBO Home Entertainment
All-region BD → £35



Following a Pakistani-American student who is accused of murder, this sombre eight-part miniseries presents viewers with a scathing account of the criminal justice system in the US. Bold and brilliant, it's a remarkable piece of television drama that deserves the plaudits that greeted its broadcast earlier this year. A similar amount of praise can also be heaped on this three-disc set's deliberately desaturated 1.78:1 1080p encodes and potent DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks. There are no bonus features included to round out an otherwise excellent Blu-ray release.



Lights Out

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£16



Director David F. Sanberg's feature-length expansion of his spooky 2013 internet short of the same name has plenty of fun playing with familiar genre tropes as it follows a family plagued by a supernatural entity that only makes its presence felt when the lights go out. Clocking in at just 81 minutes, *Lights Out* is a taut and terrifying scare-ride that lights up your home cinema setup with a richly saturated AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode and immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. The sole extra is a reel of deleted scenes, including an ill-judged nine-minute coda that was wisely cut following test screenings.



Jason's still Bourne to be wild

Superb soundmix adds plenty of thrills to the action hero's return to the bigscreen

→ JASON BOURNE

Forget all about Jeremy Renner and his *Bourne Legacy*, after an absence of almost a decade Matt Damon is back on the bigscreen in what is surely his most popular role. Not only that, he's brought director Paul Greengrass back with him. Clearly franchise fans are in for a real treat.

Well, sort of. While it's great to see Bourne back in action, it's difficult not to wish that he'd picked up some new tricks during his nine-year break. However, despite a few nods towards modern concerns about privacy and technology, the plot basically boils down to Bourne being targeted for termination by yet another in the long line of shifty CIA bosses connected to his past (Tommy Lee Jones this time out). Thankfully, the action beats are as energetic and immediate as ever, making for a thoroughly enjoyable, if hardly revelatory, popcorn flick.

Picture: Wondering how *Jason Bourne* looks on Blu-ray? All you really need to do is throw either of director Paul Greengrass's previous sequels into your disc-player, as *Jason Bourne* adheres rigidly to the filmmaker's previously established visual aesthetic of muted colours, crushed blacks and restless camera work.

While the 'shaky-cam' approach means that the disc's AVC 2.40:1 Full HD encode doesn't always get to showcase the really intricate details it's clearly capable of producing, it does demonstrate technical prowess. No matter how manic the visuals get, they always look sharp in motion and aren't troubled by compression artefacts or other encode-related anomalies.



Audio: If it's business as usual where *Jason Bourne*'s HD transfer is concerned, the audio raises things up a notch or two with a sublime DTS:X mix. Fight sequences exhibit visceral, bruising effects, while channel steering is precise and immersive. The added height layer, meanwhile, brings a greater sense of scale to sequences such as the Athens riot (Chapters 5 to 7), especially when protesters are raining Molotov cocktails down on you from above.

Extras: Accompanying the movie is a selection of brief featurettes (all under the 10-minute mark). *Bringing Back Bourne* looks at the development of the film and its themes; *Bare-Knuckle Boxing*, *Close Quarters* and *Underground Rumble* focus on the preparation and shooting of three of the fight scenes; *The Athens Escape* deals with one of the movie's key set-pieces. Finally, *Convention Chaos* and *Shutting Down the Strip* are concerned with shooting the film's Las Vegas finale.



HCC VERDICT

Jason Bourne

→ Universal Pictures → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A solid, if unexceptional, action-thriller enlivened no-end by a terrific soundtrack.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Action stations!

The third instalment of the rebooted sci-fi franchise knows that fun and excitement are all part of the *Trek* package

→ STAR TREK BEYOND 3D

Midway into his five-year mission for the Federation, Captain Kirk (Chris Pine) is suffering from a serious case of space ennui and is thinking about jacking it all in. However, Kirk's long-term plans are put on hold when the Enterprise is sent to an uncharted nebula on a rescue mission, which turns into an ambush by an alien horde led by the fierce Krall (Idris Elba). With their ship destroyed and the crew scattered across an alien world, it looks like Kirk and chums have their work cut out if they want to stop Krall's nefarious plans.

Simon Pegg claims that Jaylah was inspired by Jennifer Lawrence's character in *Winter's Bone* (Jaylah. J-Law. Geddit?)

DEMO SCREEN...

Star Trek Beyond 3D

Time code: 016.12 – 021.35



To boldly go: As the Enterprise flies into the nebula, the sound of electricity crackling around you and the bass-rich rumble of debris hitting the hull fills the Dolby Atmos soundmix.



Proximity alert: The blare of the klaxon sweeps up and over as Kirk issues the Red Alert. The ensuing alien attack continues the multichannel mayhem with devastating effect.



Engine problems: Things go from bad to worse when the swirling cloud of alien ships targets the Enterprise's warp nacelles, crashing down into the supports and severing them from the body of the ship.



Space invaders: With the Enterprise disabled, alien vessels start crashing through the hull, and the sound of wraparound destruction is peppered with laser fire. Take cover!

With J.J. Abrams busy making *Star Wars* films, the keys to the *Star Trek* universe have been handed over to Justin Lin for this third entry. Despite the concerns of some die-hard Trekkies – Lin is known for his work on the non-sci-fi *Fast & Furious* series – he proves to be a comfortable fit and demonstrates a clear understanding of both the characters and the themes that underpin Gene Roddenberry's creation.

Lin is aided massively by a fun script (co-written by Doug Jung and Simon Pegg) that shifts the focus away from solely being about Kirk and Spock (Zachary Quinto) and gives the likes of Bones (Karl Urban) and Chekov (the late Anton Yelchin) plenty to sink their teeth into. We also get a scene-stealing new female character added to the mix with scrappy, rap-loving alien Jaylah (Sofia Boutella).

As for the actual story, in many ways it feels like an episode of the old TV series, only pumped full of steroids and loaded with spectacular action scenes. While this may mean that *Star Trek Beyond* doesn't exactly 'boldly go where no man has gone before', it does what it sets out to do exceedingly well. It's not only a lot more satisfying than *Star Trek Into Darkness*, it also ranks as one of the most enjoyable entries in the entire *Trek* canon.

Picture: The stereoscopic presentation of *Star Trek Beyond* beams into home cinemas with an arresting 2.40:1 Full HD encode, despite being converted in post rather than shot in native 3D.

Although negative parallax effects are thin on the ground, the sense of depth going back into the image is very impressive and entirely convincing. Movement across the different spatial layers within the picture is also seamless, with the alien drones attacking the Enterprise (Chapter 3) swarming all over the place with no technical issues.

Even the quieter moments still impress with more subtle volumetric effects, such as the curved consoles on the bridge of the Enterprise having a truly tactile, three-dimensional quality to them.

Of course, the trade-off for all of this is a drop in brightness, but even this isn't quite as noticeable as you might expect, while colour reproduction is also



Dress-down Friday, *Star Trek* style

very strong. Generally, this is a quality stereoscopic conversion and well presented on Blu-ray.

The accompanying 'flat' 2.40:1 encode (which gets its own separate HD platter) is just as impressive from a technical point of view. Crisp, clean and packed with detail, it's very much what you'd want from a modern VFX-heavy tentpole movie. Blacks are gorgeously deep, and contrast levels are high, giving the varied colours on show plenty of impact. Again, there's not a trace of any pesky compression issues to be seen.

Audio: *Star Trek Beyond*'s Dolby Atmos soundtrack gives us another reason to cheer. Right from the opening scene, the height channels are employed to inspired effect, while sonic details whip through the surrounds and weighty LFE threatens to shake your framed Federation shirt off the wall.

We're sure that it'll come as no surprise that the boisterous set-piece sequences sound superb, but just as impressive are the smaller atmospheric details. The interior of the Enterprise, for example, feels like a living, breathing three-dimensional space, thanks to all manner of retro 'pings' and 'bloops' cropping up in the surrounds. The mix continually strives to deliver on ambience.

Extras: Relegated to the set's 2D platter, *Star Trek Beyond*'s extras offer an informative peak into the film's production.

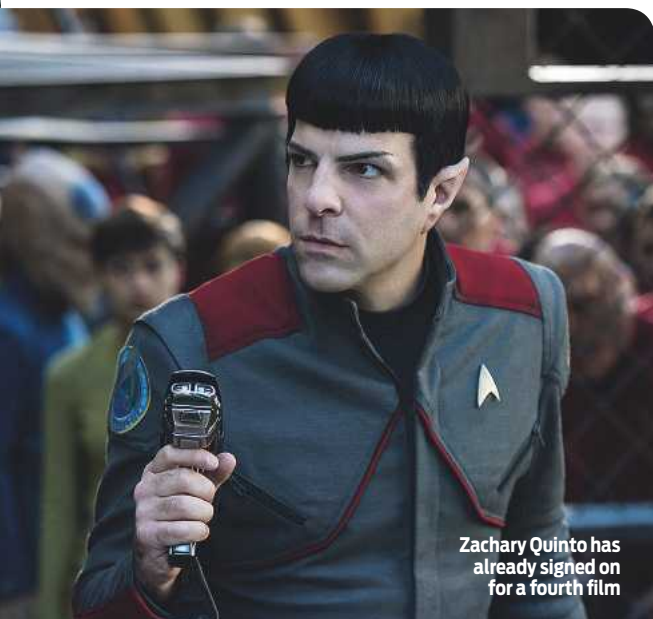
Beyond the Darkness is a 10-minute overview of the development of the film. As the title indicates, *Enterprise Takedown* (five minutes) is devoted to the destruction of the iconic spaceship (an event that might be considered a spoiler if it didn't happen in practically every other *Star Trek* movie). *Divided and Conquered* (eight minutes) focuses on some of the unexpected character pairings in the script and how their abilities complement each other.

A Warped Sense of Revenge (five minutes) deals with new villain Krall, while *Trekking in the Desert* (three minutes) covers shooting in Dubai. *Exploring Strange New Worlds* (six minutes) looks at the work of production designer Tom Sanders, *New Life, New Civilizations* (eight minutes) studies the film's alien creations, and *To Live Long and Prosper* (eight minutes) explores the legacy of the franchise.

Finishing things off are a gag reel, two deleted scenes and a touching tribute to recently deceased *Star Trek* actors Leonard Nimoy and Anton Yelchin.



A familiar sight, but one that still brings a tear to any Trekkie's eye (below)



Zachary Quinto has already signed on for a fourth film

HCC VERDICT

Star Trek Beyond 3D

→ Paramount/Universal Pictures
→ All-region BD → £28

WE SAY: Sci-fi fans should waste no time beaming this superb Blu-ray release into their disc collection.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



Battlefield 1

Electronic Arts → PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows → £55

As subject matters go, war has to be one of the most commonly used for games – especially in first-person shooters. We've had plenty of World War II shooters, a couple based in Vietnam and a shedload focusing on near- and far-future warfare. Very few, however, have attempted to recreate the battlefields of the first World War. Indeed, *Battlefield 1* could be the first.

The game starts very strongly, with a poignant reminder of how brutal the Great War was and the fatality rate of the millions who fought in it. Of course, it can't continue in this vein for long and present an enjoyable action game, but it does feel different to most shoot-em-ups out there. There's a lot more mud for starters.

Like the previous *Battlefield* games (and sister title *Star Wars Battlefront*) it's most enjoyable as a multiplayer skirmish game, with up to 64 players all fighting online at the same time. It makes for some epic events, and as you can ride on horses, in vehicles, or fly biplanes and airships, there's plenty of variety in the action to boot.

Single-player campaigns are also on offer, with different characters each getting four or five missions across small vignettes in different world locations. While we'd have liked an over-arching, cinematic story, we suppose the war itself serves that purpose.

Alongside clever, considered gameplay, *Battlefield 1* also shines graphically. The Frostbite 4 Engine (used on the aforementioned *Star Wars* title and even *FIFA 17*) makes yet another welcome outing here. The version for the new PS4 Pro even ups the graphical fidelity to 4K (checkerboard rather than native, but still impressive).

The game is also presented with HDR, ramping up the colour punch and giving brightness that leaves an impression on your retinas. Dolby Digital 5.1 audio matches the excellent images.

Standard console owners still get a great visual treat, albeit with fewer bells and whistles. And, of course, the gameplay is identical across the board. It's just that if you were looking for a reason to invest in Sony's latest console to go with your 4K HDR TV or projector, this could very well be it.

Battlefield 1 is a beautiful, fun-filled game. And, therefore, pretty much the opposite of the horrifying war it is based on.



Daredevil: The Complete First Season

Walt Disney → All-region BD
£35



While the Marvel Cinematic Universe specialises in world-ending threats, those craving more street-level comic book heroics will adore this hard-hitting series. A suitably gritty, violent and thoughtful take on Marvel's complex hero Matt Murdock/Daredevil (Charlie Cox) and his nemesis Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio), this 13-episode run is simply the best superhero show we've seen. What a shame then, that there are no extra features accompanying the 1080p transfers and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes that this Blu-ray release offers.



iZombie: The Complete First Season

Warner Bros. → R2 DVD
£30



Infected by a zombie during a party, Olivia 'Liv' Moore (Rose McIver) works in a Seattle morgue as a way of acquiring the human brains she must eat to survive. However, Liv also inherits memories from the brains she scoffs, which she uses to aid the police in tracking down their killers. Developed by *Veronica Mars* creator Rob Thomas, *iZombie* is a similarly inventive and amusing variation on the police procedural, albeit with added undead action (no bad thing in our book). This DVD release sports attractive anamorphic 1.78:1 transfers, modest DD 5.1 sonics, deleted scenes and a half-hour Comic-Con panel.



Lucifer: The Complete First Season

Warner Bros. → R2 DVD
£30



If a zombie-based cop show isn't your thing (see above), then how about one that finds a Los Angeles detective solving crimes with the aid of the Devil? Yes, of course it's ridiculous, but it's also a lot of fun, with the chemistry between Lauren German's detective Chloe Decker and Tom Ellis' Lucifer ensuring that the character interplay never feels flat even when some of the storylines do. On top of solid anamorphic 1.78:1 visuals and DD 5.1 audio, this three-disc DVD set includes deleted scenes, character profiles, a gag reel and a panel discussion.



He's not a giant. She's just really far away



The big friendly blockbuster

Steven Spielberg lets his inner child run free with this giant-sized Roald Dahl adaptation

→ THE BFG 3D

Steven Spielberg and Roald Dahl. One is a modern master of cinematic storytelling who has frequently put children at the heart of his films, the other a best-selling author who is regarded as one of the 20th century's best children's storytellers. On paper it sounds like a match made in blockbuster heaven. So why, then, did Hollywood's big-budget adaptation of *The BFG* fail to set the box office alight?

Quite honestly, we've no idea. After all, it's a far better film than Tim Burton's dismal *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which is still the reigning box office champ where Dahl adaptations are concerned, with worldwide takings almost double that of *The BFG*'s \$243m. Maybe there's some sort of inverse law regarding the quality of a Roald Dahl adaptation and the money it takes at the box office (which would explain why Wes Anderson's magnificent *Fantastic Mr Fox* only pulled in \$45m worldwide).

Thankfully, this Blu-ray release should provide Spielberg's film another chance to find the audience it deserves. And make no mistake about it: *The BFG* is a glorumptious piece of family entertainment.

Clearly some compromises had to be made in order to reshape Dahl's story for the screen. However, the script (written by Spielberg's *E.T.*: *The Extra-Terrestrial* collaborator, the late Melissa Mathison) retains enough traces of darkness and melancholy, not to mention an unwillingness to talk down to its young audience, to make it still feel like the product of Dahl's fluid imagination.

The film is also a visual treat, employing the latest digital visual effects to bring Giant Country to life in stunning fashion. Amidst all of this technological wizardry is a tender mo-capped performance from Mark Rylance as the BFG himself, bringing heart and soul to the digitally-animated character.

Picture: This stereoscopic Blu-ray release serves up separate platters for the 3D and 2D 2.40:1 1080p presentations of Spielberg's film.

Both are excellent encodes, but it's the 3D version that is the real draw here, with Spielberg smartly employing the technology to heighten the scale of the giant world Ruby Barnhill's Sophie finds herself trapped in. Whether it's an epic action scene such as the giants searching high and low for Sophie in the BFG's workshop (Chapter 13), or something as simple as the BFG's dream horn stretching into the Queen's bedroom (Chapter 15), there's always a palpable sense of depth and space in the image.

Audio: *The BFG* benefits from a great Dolby Atmos track. With so much of the film being presented from Sophie's point-of-view, it should come as no surprise to find that the height speakers get plenty of use. From other giants bullying the BFG to whizzpopping corgis, the surround speakers are kept busy at all times, and there's rich LFE backing it up.

Extras: As well as a well-made *Making of...* doc (27 minutes) and a featurette about creating the film's giants (five minutes), the Blu-ray also offers an animated storybook, a guide to the gobblefunk lexicon and a tribute to Melissa Mathison.



Dahl named the story's lead character Sophie after his granddaughter



HCC VERDICT

The BFG 3D

→ Entertainment One
→ Region B BD → £28

WE SAY: Lashings of stereoscopic spectacle make this magical family film worth savouring on Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Remastering the kung fu master

Seconds out! Round two! Bruce Lee returns to the Blu-ray dojo for a hi-def rematch...

→ **BRUCE LEE: THE MASTER COLLECTION**

It's hard to believe that there is anybody reading this magazine that isn't already familiar with the films of Bruce Lee – especially as four of them only made their hi-def debut on these shores late last year.

This new boxset collects together all four of Lee's completed features – *The Big Boss* (1971), *Fist of Fury* (1972), *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) and *Enter the Dragon* (1973) – along with *Game of Death* (1978), which incorporates footage of Lee from a film he was still working on at the time of his passing. As fans will know, while the quality of the films may vary, they remain a fascinating and endlessly-rewatchable legacy of one of the true icons of action cinema.

But can this boxset actually bring anything new to the party? Well, as it happens...

Picture: Anybody who either picked up or read our review of the original individual Blu-rays for *The Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury*, *The Way of the Dragon* and *Game of Death* will know that they were hit or miss affairs. There were positive elements to the transfers, but plenty of negatives too – not least *Game of Death*, which appeared to be nothing more than a rudimentary upscale.

The...*Master Collection* boxset does away with those previous HD masters and instead utilises new 4K restorations produced at Italy's L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory. Clarity and sharpness have been improved across the four titles, with the most obvious beneficiaries being *Fist of Fury* and *Game of Death*. Improvements on the other two titles are less pronounced due to the reasonable quality of the



That's gotta hurt!

earlier discs for those films. That's not to say they are perfect though, as all four of the new 4K restorations feature a curious yellow bias to their white levels.

Although we weren't supplied with a copy of the *Enter the Dragon* Blu-ray for review, the label informs us that it will be the upgraded *Ultimate Collector's Edition* platter Warner Bros. put out in 2013.

Audio: With the exception of *Enter the Dragon* (which only offers a DTS-HD MA 5.1 track), the other films tote a plethora of DTS-HD MA 5.1 and Dolby Digital 2.0 audio options, where applicable in a variety of languages (Cantonese, Mandarin and English). However, the actual quality of the source material often leaves much to be desired.

Extras: All of the previous Blu-ray extras are present, including the many commentaries and interviews. Exclusive to this set is a bonus DVD housing two feature-length docs: 1973's *Bruce Lee: The Man and the Legend* and 1984's *Bruce Lee, the Legend*.



HCC VERDICT

Bruce Lee: The Master Collection

→ MediumRare Entertainment
→ Region B BD → £60

WE SAY: Not quite perfect, but still a significant improvement over the previous UK Blu-ray presentations.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Dark Water

Arrow Video → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£25



Following the success of *Ringu* and its sequel, director Hideo Kojima tried his hand with a different type of ghost story with this brilliant 2002 fright film. *Dark Water* may generate a similar sort of supernatural terror to *Ringu*, but balances it with a sense of melancholy, grown from more human concerns regarding family and mental health. Although the hi-def master used as the basis for this Blu-ray shows room for improvement, the 1080p imagery is still a huge step up in quality over the old R2 DVD. Meanwhile, the BD's atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack and plentiful extras are above reproach.



The Greasy Strangler

Picturehouse Entertainment
All-region BD → £23



Rarely have we encountered a film that proved as difficult to review as *The Greasy Strangler*. A deliberate attempt to make a 'bad' movie, this off-kilter and wilfully vile horror-comedy actively relishes the sort of dreadful performances and idiotic storytelling that would find other films receiving a critical drubbing. Still, it made us chuckle quite a bit (when we stopping gagging) and that's probably all that really matters. In addition to crisply delineated 1080p visuals and rather unambitious DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics, this Blu-ray finds space for an amusing audio commentary.



Punch-Drunk Love

Criterion Collection → Region B BD
£25



Back in 2002 funnyman Adam Sandler proved that he could actually do something other than act like an idiotic man-child in this oddly poignant rom-com about a lonely and volatile novelty toilet-plunger salesman whose latest chance of finding love is threatened by a phone sex extortion racket. Based on a 4K digital transfer overseen by director Paul Thomas Anderson, this disc's 2.40:1 Full HD encode serves the sometimes avant-garde visuals well. Meanwhile, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix does likewise with the film's expressive sound design and composer Jon Brion's experimental score.



Supersonic

Entertainment One → Region B BD
£25



Rather than offering a full history of legendary Britpop band Oasis, this energetic documentary is essentially a window into the hype that surrounded the band from the launch of *Definitely Maybe* in 1994 up to the record-breaking Knebworth gigs in 1996. And while it won't convert those who hate their songs, there's plenty of enjoyment to be had from the candid accounts of the band's many bust-ups. While this Blu-ray's 1.85:1 1080i video is understandably limited by archival source material, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack packs a punch whenever the talking stops and the music kicks in.





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Blake was livid at the thought that her fake tan might wash off...



You don't need a bigger boat

This brisk and brutal survival thriller impresses with its stripped-down, back-to-basics approach

→ THE SHALLOWS

Since time immemorial (well, 1975) Hollywood has been obsessed with making movies about people being eaten by sharks. The past decade, in particular, has seen the predatory piscine sub-genre go into overdrive, thanks largely to the availability of low-cost digital effects. But in a world of gimmicky fish flicks like *Shark in Venice* and *Ghost Shark*, slick survival movie *The Shallows* is a breath of salty air.

The film stars Blake Lively as Nancy, a holidaying medical student who goes surfing at a secluded beach. Before long, she's attacked by a great white shark and finds herself stranded on rocks a couple of hundred yards from shore. And that's basically all there is to it (give or take a rusty buoy, an injured seagull and a rotting whale carcass).

Stripping away all of the unnecessary excesses that have come to typify the killer shark film, *The Shallows* is able to focus on the key ingredients: an attractive girl in a bikini and a hungry aquatic beast. In doing so it serves up a truly primal story of (wo)man vs nature.

Blake Lively deserves plenty of praise for a gutsy performance that sees her transition from battered and bruised shark attack survivor to marine MacGuyver. However, the real star is director Jaume Collet-Sera, until now best



Open wide and say 'Aaaaaaaarrrggghhh!'

known for helping a trio of enjoyable Liam Neeson thrillers (*Unknown*, *Non-Stop* and *Run All Night*). Bringing the same visceral energy and stylistic verve to *The Shallows* as he did to those films, Collet-Sera transforms what would otherwise have been a trashy exploitation movie into a genuinely thrilling and beautiful piece of cinematic entertainment.

Picture: Thanks to its lush tropical setting and crisp digital photography, *The Shallows* swims onto BD with a gorgeous 2.40:1-framed 1080p transfer.

From aquatic blues to deep crimson reds, the colour palette is beautifully saturated, while black levels are rock solid. Fine detailing also impresses, with close-ups of Nancy's wet suit revealing a wealth of textures. Indeed, outside of a few brief bursts of in-film footage shot by a surfer's GoPro camera, *The Shallows* delivers reference-quality imagery from start to end.

Audio: The film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is an atmospheric affair that is kept busy throughout with the sound of the sea lapping around you. Naturally, things get much more dynamic during the action set-pieces, lending the shark attacks considerable aural support. Meanwhile, music and dialogue are prioritised in the mix and are reproduced flawlessly.

Extras: In addition to three deleted scenes and three *Making of...* featurettes – *Shooting in The Shallows* (six minutes), *How to Build a Shark* (seven minutes) and *Finding the Perfect Beach: Lord Howe Island* (six minutes) – Sony's HD platter includes a short video talking to a real-life shark attack survivor. A film this entertaining deserves better.

HCC VERDICT

The Shallows

→ Sony Pictures → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A stunning HD presentation of a killer survival flick. Shame about the lack of extras, though.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HOME CINEMA CHOICE

All the President's Men

Warner Bros. → All-region BD & R2 DVD
£15 (HMV exclusive)



One of the best films ever made about both newspaper journalism and politics, *All the President's Men*

transforms the Watergate scandal into a gripping thriller. While the film is a masterpiece, there's still some room for improvement where this 'Premium Collection' Blu-ray's rather narrow and cluttered DTS-HD MA 2.0 mix is concerned. Thankfully, the 1.78:1 1080p visuals are more robust, retaining an authentically gritty, yet detailed aesthetic. Informative extras include a commentary and four retrospective featurettes.



Kes

Eureka: Masters of Cinema
Region B BD → £20



This 1969 social-realist drama, about a teenager who finds an unlikely escape from the endless misery of

school and family life when he starts training a kestrel, remains one of director Ken Loach's most affecting films. A very welcome addition to Eureka's Masters of Cinema lineup, this excellent disc delivers strong AVC 1.66:1 Full HD video and clean LPCM mono presentations of the original soundtrack and a re-dubbed track with 'softened' Barnsley accents 'requested' by distributor United Artists. Quality extras include new interviews and footage from a 1992 Loach lecture.



Akira Kurosawa's Dreams

Criterion Collection → Region B BD
£25



While it may not rank amongst his greatest work, filmmaker Akira Kurosawa still treated cinema audiences to

a real feast for the eyes with this episodic 1990 effort consisting of eight shorts inspired by Japanese folklore and his own dreams. Based on a new 4K restoration supervised by the cinematographer, this disc's 1.85:1-framed 1080p encode is quite simply breathtaking (the Van Gogh sequence being a particular treat) and is joined by a lyrical DTS-HD MA 2.0 track. A 151 minute *Making of...* documentary heads up an excellent array of extras.



Jamaica Inn

Arrow Academy → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £20



Regularly cited as one of Hitchcock's worst films (by both critics and the man himself), this 1939 adaptation

of Daphne du Maurier's novel is certainly an uneven affair, but still has plenty to recommend it – not least Hitchcock's assured direction and a wonderfully loathsome performance from Charles Laughton as the villain of the piece. This UK Blu-ray appears very similar to the 2015 US release, right down to the excellent 1080p video (based on a recent 4K restoration) and trio of bonus bits (a chat-track, visual essay and trailer). It does, however, include a new booklet.



Home cinema comes under siege

John Carpenter's exploitation classic tools up for hi-def action with a killer Blu-ray package

→ ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13: LIMITED EDITION

Two years prior to kick-starting his career as a master of horror with *Halloween*, filmmaker John Carpenter channelled his love of Westerns into this superb 1976 contemporary homage to the 1959 Howard Hawks classic *Rio Bravo*.

Assault on Precinct 13 stars Austin Stoker as Ethan Bishop, a South Central Los Angeles cop overseeing a soon-to-be-shuttered police precinct. Trouble raises its head when the building is targeted by a heavily-armed street gang, forcing the decommissioned precinct's skeleton staff to work together with a couple of convicts to keep the gang at bay and survive the night.

It's easy to see why this low-budget action thriller remains a firm favourite with genre fans and film critics. Lacking the funds to shoot any extraneous material, Carpenter had no option but to focus all his efforts to the core idea. The outcome is a taut and ruthlessly efficient exploitation movie, dedicated solely to the inexorable ratcheting up of the tension as it builds towards its pulse-pounding finale.

Picture: While there may be some small differences, by and large the 2.35:1 encode here looks almost identical to the one on Shout Factory's US Blu-ray, with colours appearing far closer to that release than the over-saturated reds of Capelight's German disc.

The encode is sure-footed, with good detailing and solid black levels on show throughout almost all of the movie. The only exception to this is a short sequence that runs from 54.50 to 55.43, which sees



a big drop off in sharpness and clarity, almost as if a dupe element has been used. However, it's worth noting that this anomaly is true of the other Blu-rays, too, and obviously stems from the source elements.

Audio: Take your pick from an LPCM dual-mono track or a DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix. Source limitations are evident in both, but the latter does at least make effective use of the surrounds during the siege scenes as gunfire impacts around your movie room.

Extras: As well as a CD soundtrack and five art cards, Second Sight's Limited Edition Blu-ray is also loaded with disc-based goodies. You get two chat-tracks (from Carpenter and art director/sound effects designer Tommy Lee Wallace); Carpenter's rarely seen 1969 student film *Captain Voyeur* (in HD); five cast/crew interviews; the trailer; radio spots; and a film from 2002 about the search for retired actress Laurie Zimmer (aka Laura Fanning).



HCC VERDICT

Assault on Precinct 13: Limited Edition

→ Second Sight → Region B BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A stupendous hi-def release for this vintage actioner. Well worth the upgrade.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Universal keeps faith in 3D

Vintage sci-fi flick delivers plenty of eye-popping thrills with this great HD platter

→ IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

At a time when some TV manufacturers are dropping 3D functionality from their newfangled 4K flatscreens (see p75), it's a pleasure to find that some Hollywood studios are still supporting the format. Case in point: Universal Pictures' Blu-ray outing for this 1953 science-fiction classic.

When a meteor crashes near the sleepy Arizona town of Sand Rock, local author and amateur astronomer John Putnam (Richard Carlson) heads out to investigate. What he finds is no mere space rock, but a crashed spaceship.

Directed by Jack 'Creature from the Black Lagoon' Arnold and based on a story treatment by sci-fi author Ray Bradbury, *It Came from Outer Space* is an absolute doozy of a film. But what really cements its place in history is its status as one of the first major Hollywood studio 3D projects (arriving in US cinemas less than a month behind Warner's groundbreaking *House of Wax*), as well as the way in which it set the template for many of the sci-fi films that followed in its footsteps.

Picture: Produced under the auspices of Bob Furmanek and Greg Kintz of the 3-D Film Archive, with additional restoration and clean-up work by Thad Komorowski (who worked on the likes of *McCabe & Mrs Miller* and *Cat People* for Criterion), it's safe to say that *It Came From Outer Space* looks better than ever on this Blu-ray.

The 1.33:1-framed 3D presentation is particularly striking, demonstrating an excellent sense of depth and volumetric space, with no trace of any alignment issues. And although the native film grain looks



a little coarse (especially in the 2D presentation) fine detail is retained at all times.

Audio: *It Came from Outer Space* was originally released with a three-track stereophonic soundtrack, which has been given fresh life here as an excellent (not to mention, loud) DTS-HD MA 3.0 L/C/R affair. The new mix does an fine job handling the tricky source material with no loss of dynamic range, while also offering clear separation across the three channels. And, of course, the iconic Theremin score that accompanies the aliens' activities has never sounded better or creepier.

Extras: Anybody expecting another barebones effort like Universal's previous *Jaws 3* 3D Blu-ray is in for a pleasant surprise. As well as the trailer (in both 2D and 3D), this budget disc finds space for a 32 minute doc about the studio's sci-fi vault with a major focus on *It Came From Outer Space*, and a breathless chat-track by film historian Tom Weaver.



Out of this world stereoscopic thrills!

HCC VERDICT

It Came from Outer Space

→ Universal Pictures → All-region BD → £10

WE SAY: Sensational stereoscopic visuals and retooled audio make this Blu-ray a real treat for fans of 1950s sci-fi.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Them!

Warner Bros. → All-region BD & R2 DVD
£15 (HMV exclusive)



From *Tarantula* to *The Deadly Mantis*, cinemas throughout the 1950s were apparently packed with big bug movies. Towering above them all, however, is director Gordon

Douglas' surprisingly smart and serious creature-feature pitting humanity against giant ants in a battle that rages from the deserts of New Mexico to the sewers of Los Angeles. While it doesn't offer much in the way of extras (just a trailer, some outtakes and four art cards), this Blu-ray impresses with its pleasingly delineated 1.78:1-framed 1080p visuals and effective DTS-HD MA mono soundtrack.



Logan's Run

Warner Bros. → All-region BD & R2 DVD
£15 (HMV exclusive)



This hit 1976 film is a fun sci-fi romp based around a few of the key sociological issues of the time, albeit

hampered by some rather threadbare plotting and less-than-special effects. Clearly based on the 2009 US Blu-ray, the 2.35:1-framed 1080p encode is really starting to show its age and looks neither as sharp nor as saturated as you might expect. As with that earlier release, this UK platter forgoes the film's original soundtrack in favour of a middling Dolby TrueHD 5.1 remix. Bonus goodies take the form of a chat-track, an archival promo featurette, a trailer and some postcards.



Prison

88 Films → Region B BD
£12



Notable for marking the US debut of director Renny Harlin and giving Viggo Mortensen an early lead role, this 1988

horror has the angry spirit of a convict executed for a crime he didn't commit wreaking havoc in a recently reopened prison. A typical haunted house film in all but name, *Prison* benefits from effective stylistic flourishes and inventive death scenes. This UK disc sports a nicely textured Full HD encode and a choice of DTS-HD MA stereo and 5.1 soundtracks. Sadly, 88 Films was either unwilling or unable to license the retrospective doc or chat-track from the 2013 US release.



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Collecting...

Memory loss movies

The Bourne franchise isn't the first time Hollywood has made narrative hay from amnesia.

Team HCC remembers ten other movies that stick in the memory for being forgetful...

TOTAL RECALL

Ordinary man becomes slick secret agent after a memory implant process actually uncovers hidden memories of his past life. Or maybe he's imagining it. Either way, Paul Verhoeven's adaptation of a Philip K. Dick story is a sci-fi smasher, and the more recent remake (pictured), which ramps up the chase-based action, is worth a watch too.

Get it: For the original, grab StudioCanal's Verhoeven-approved 2012 Blu-ray. As for the remake, the two-disc Extended Director's Cut edition packs plenty of extras in addition to two edits of the movie, while a Mastered in 4K release ditches all the goodies and presents the theatrical release with a bitrate bump and extended colour.

Colin Farrell straps in for the ride in 2012's *Total Recall* remake



THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT

Impressively bonkers 1996 action flick from Renny Harlin (with a typically sharp script from *Lethal Weapon* scribe Shane Black), where amnesiac housewife Geena Davis gradually discovers she's actually a CIA assassin with handy knife skills and sets about righting some wrongs with the help of Samuel L. Jackson's private eye.

Get it: Image and audio quality on Warner's budget BD release are solid, but there are no extra features here to indulge in.



UNKNOWN

HCC fave Liam Neeson began a fruitful relationship with director Jaume Collet-Serra with this twisty Euro-thriller about a doctor involved in a car crash in Berlin awaking from a coma after four days to discover that he's got gaps in his memory and somebody else is living his life. In other words, it's essentially *Taken* meets *The Bourne Identity* with added Hitchcockian intrigue.

Get it: StudioCanal's UK Blu-ray looks and sounds superb. Shame someone forgot to include any decent extras, though.



ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

Back in 2004, Jim Carrey stopped pulling funny faces long enough to star in this smart and inventive drama as a man undergoing an experimental procedure to have all memories of his ex-girlfriend (Kate Winslet) erased. Funny and shrewd in its depiction of love and loss, *Eternal Sunshine...* is quite simply unforgettable.

Get it: The 2011 Momentum Pictures Blu-ray doesn't exactly scream 'demo disc!' but it can be had for less than a tenner.



RESIDENT EVIL

Based on the hit videogame of the same name, this action-horror hybrid features Milla Jovovich as Alice, a young woman who wakes in the bathroom of a deserted mansion suffering with amnesia. Thankfully, her memory loss doesn't seem to affect her ability to kung-fu kick zombie dogs, which is going to prove pretty handy in the immediate future...

Get it: This good-looking title is available as both a standalone Blu-ray or as part of the *Resident Evil Collection* boxset.

TOP PICK



DARK CITY

The film noir and sci-fi genres come crashing together in this excellent thriller. Rufus Sewell's memory-troubled man is accused of murder – his only hope of salvation lies in uncovering the truth about the mysterious 'Strangers' pursuing him. What follows is a visually-arresting, Kafka-esque nightmare that grips from the start and doesn't let go until the end credits roll.

Get it: With the US platter locked to Region A and the 2008 UK disc seemingly now out-of-print (and commanding some silly prices) your best bet may be to import the Region B Australian disc.



SPELLBOUND

Mid-period Hitchcock with Ingrid Bergman starring as a psychoanalyst dealing with an amnesiac colleague (Gregory Peck) who might be a killer. This is the usual Hitch mix of melodrama, plot twists and nail-biting tension, but with some surreal Salvador Dali-designed visuals thrown in for good measure.

Get it: *Spellbound* isn't part of either Universal's ...*Masterpiece Collection* or Warner's ...*Hitchcock Collection*, and is unavailable on UK Blu-ray. Thankfully, MGM's extras-packed US release is region-free.



MEMENTO

A finely-crafted, mind-frazzling low-budget thriller from Christopher Nolan before his Batman days. Guy Pearce leads as the man suffering from short-term memory loss trying to unravel the mystery surrounding his wife's death. Switching timelines (denoted by monochrome-to-colour transitions) and its unreliable narrator mean *Memento* keeps its intrigue levels high.

Get it: In addition to a standalone Blu-ray, Nolan fans might fancy the nine-disc *Christopher Nolan Director's Collection* boxset, which also includes his Dark Knight trilogy, *Inception* and *The Prestige*.



FAST & FURIOUS 6

How do you bring back a long-dead character to give your franchise a fresh lease of life? Just make them not actually dead, but afflicted by a severe bout of amnesia and working with the bad guys. Such plot shenanigans saw Letty (Michelle Rodriguez) return to the *F&F* fold and doing battle with former lover Dom (Vin Diesel). It's both preposterous and clever, much like the movie itself.

Get it: The obvious purchase is the *7-Movie Collection* Blu-ray boxset, but seeing as eighth, ninth and tenth entries are planned, maybe not...

FINDING NEMO

Pixar's brilliant aquamation centres on clownfish Marlin searching for his titular offspring, aided by Dory, a kind-spirited fish with a woefully short memory span. Obviously, this leads to plenty of gags, but helps drive the story forward too. And audiences enjoyed Dory so much that a recent sequel from original writer Andrew Stanton (*Finding Dory*, natch) sees her become the focus of a new seabed adventure.

Get it: The movie was re-released theatrically in 3D in 2012, and a UK BD issued the following year houses this version – which is very nicely done – and the 2D original. Some of the extras from the US release went missing, though.



Have we forgotten your favourite memory loss movie?
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Outstanding	★★★★★
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Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

TOP 10 Televisions

**Panasonic TX-65DX902B** → £3,300

★★★★★

This HDR-capable 65-incher wears its Ultra HD Premium certification with pride, and employs a full-array backlight to take control of its impressive luminance talents. Imagery is excellent; overall styling is appealing too. *HCC #259*

**LG OLED65E6** → £4,500 ★★★★★

Nominally a step-down from the Signature G6, but most will consider the tweaked bezel design and inferior sonics of this OLED worth settling for considering the price difference. *HCC #265*

**Samsung UE65KS9500** → £3,800 ★★★★★

Replacing the edge LED system of the KS9000 with a direct array yields illumination improvements. Colour-rich, super-bright visuals and smart design. Lacks 3D support. *HCC #265*

**LG OLED65G6** → £6,000 ★★★★★

An essential audition if your pockets are deep enough – this super-slim flat OLED TV combines the tech's PQ charms with a stunning design and nuanced sound performance. *HCC #264*

**Sony KD-75XD9405** → £5,000 ★★★★★

For this 75in HDR flagship, Sony adopts a full array LED backlight. The result is a step-up in image quality over smaller, edge-lit siblings. A big, bold – and expensive – TV. *HCC #261*

**Samsung UE55KS9000** → £2,100 ★★★★★

Samsung's quantum dot/edge LED 4K/HDR looker claims UHD Premium certification. Image quality is routinely great, but light banding can distract and 3D is absent. *HCC #260*

**Samsung UE55KS7000** → £1,300 ★★★★★

Straddling the world between genuine budget sets and more premium competitors, this 55-incher is perhaps Samsung's most appealing model. Impressive with both SDR and HDR. *HCC #265*

**Panasonic TX-50DX750** → £1,300 ★★★★★

Mid-range 4K/HDR LED TV. Not as impactful as its DX902 stablemate when it comes to pictures, but a neat design, fun UI and appealing screen size will win it plenty of fans. *HCC #260*

**Hisense 65XT910** → £2,300 ★★★★★

The Chinese marque throws down the UHD/HDR gauntlet to its better-known rivals with this big, well-priced, high-spec TV. Bright and clear images, but short on motion subtlety. *#257*

**Hitachi 49GHT69U** → £500 ★★★★★

49in 4K screen that could appeal to those on tight budgets. This £500 set offers a smattering of catchup, decent connectivity and a generally enjoyable image. No HDR support, though. *HCC #260*

TECH INFO: TELEVISIONS



What? No plasma?: The TV market is now dominated by LED-lit LCD screens. Manufacture and sale of plasma display panels (PDPs), which previously came into play above 42in, has ceased. With LED comes newer technologies. 4K models with a native resolution of 3,840 x 2,160 should at least be on your audition list if you're thinking of a new display; curved models are a consideration if you want to impress the neighbours. Look out for sets offering support for HDR content, which is part of the UHD Blu-ray spec.



Active or Passive: At the beginning of the 3D era, most TVs featured the Active system that uses relatively expensive, powered 3D specs to deliver full-res images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs, which are now more common, have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of Full HD 3D is halved to 540 lines horizontally (but remains at 1,920 vertically). The same halving occurs with a 4K screen. Some brands offer both Passive and Active models, depending on the panel used. Glasses-free 3D, heralded by Toshiba's early ZL2 TV, hasn't caught on. The tech is still being worked on, though.

TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**The Revenant**

Leonardo DiCaprio excels in this brutal period survival drama, and it arrives on UHD Blu-ray with an HDR 10 encode that relishes the naturally-lit cinematography. Masterful DTS-HD mix, too, but more extras would be nice.

★★★★★

**Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**

Either a brilliantly epic, Easter Egg-laden superhero fest, or an overwrought misfire from DC/Warner Bros. Either way, the Ultra HD Blu-ray release is a corker.

★★★★★

**The Jungle Book 3D**

Disney waves its live-action wand at Rudyard Kipling's famous tale of a boy and some beasts. Family fun that's stunning to look at (although the 3D presentation isn't as pleasing as its 2D partner).

★★★★★

**Zootropolis**

Disney's great run of CG 'toons continues in this layered, politically subversive animals-as-cops tale. The 2.40:1 image quality is simply gorgeous, while the DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack bristles with activity.

★★★★★

**Captain America: Civil War**

The third standalone flick for Steve Rogers' baddie-battler is more of an Avengers ensemble (complete with Spider-Man!) that excels in every possible way. The BD has superb 2D/3D imagery and DTS-HD 7.1 sonics.

★★★★★

TOP 10 Blu-ray & Ultra HD Blu-ray players

- 1**  **Panasonic DMP-UB900 → £600** ★★★★★
 Boom! The Ultra HD Blu-ray format gets an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers welcome user tweaks and a sterling picture performance. Smart skills include 4K-enabled VOD apps. *HCC #259*
- 2**  **Oppo BDP-103D → £600** ★★★★★
 This deck adds Darbee Visual Presence processing to the already excellent AV skills of its BDP-103EU predecessor. Superb construction, usability and features/connections. *HCC #228*
- 3**  **Pioneer BDP-LX88 → £1,100** ★★★★★
 The Japanese corp returns to the disc-playing high-end with a universal deck that weighs more than your AVR and drips with user tweaks and processing features. Stonking performer. *HCC #246*
- 4**  **Oppo BDP-105D → £1,100** ★★★★★
 This heavyweight deck builds upon the premium picture performance of the BDP-103D with a wealth of audiophile upgrades – if you're serious about music, check it out. *HCC #234*
- 5**  **Sony UHP-H1 → £400** ★★★★★
 Likely to be its last top-line BD deck before Sony embraces UHD, this player pleases with wide-ranging audio support (including DVD-A!), exquisite construction and slick performance. *HCC #261*
- 6**  **Arcam FMJ UDP411 → £1,200** ★★★★★
 Pristine visuals – including upscaled SD – and a classy sonic performance grant this Arcam instant appeal. The design and build is commensurate with the premium price tag. *HCC #244*
- 7**  **Sony BDP-S7200 → £180** ★★★★★
 A Sony deck without the curious angular design, the BDP-S7200 offers SACD support, hi-res audio streaming and 4K upscaling that's worth investigation. Not too pricey, either. *HCC #239*
- 8**  **Samsung UBD-K8500 → £430** ★★★★★
 Ultra HD Blu-ray player that'll find fans courtesy of its sensible price point, connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. *HCC #260*
- 9**  **LG BP556 → £85** ★★★★★ NEW ENTRY
 LG's top-of-the-line(!) disc-spinner is actually a budget offering. Design is a bit garish, but the addition of multiroom streaming, some smart apps and file playback sweeten the deal. *HCC #266*
- 10**  **Samsung BD-J7500 → £150** ★★★★★
 This well-priced spinner offers twin HDMI outputs and multichannel phono audio for flexible system hookup, an appealing design, smart features and solid AV chops. *HCC #247*

TECH INFO: BLU-RAY PLAYERS

Matching your deck to your AV receiver: Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a player, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your AV receiver. If you're still using an older model that doesn't offer HDMI inputs, then you'll need a Blu-ray player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy decoded hi-res surround sound formats. Similarly, older but still HDMI-equipped receivers may not be able to cope with 3D/4K/HDR output signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one channelling audio to your receiver amp, the other piping video direct to your TV.

What about the PlayStation?: Sony's console still represents an easy path to hi-def heaven. For a low-budget home cinema system, the £150 PS3 Super Slim makes a decent choice – especially if you like playing games. Control via a joypad is a pain, though, and the console runs more noisily than most BD spinners. The more expensive PS4 is a much better gaming machine, and now available in a ITB version.



DEMO DELIGHT

Lucy: The popcorn-munching Luc Besson sci-fi/actioner starring Scarlett Johansson scrubs up great on Universal's Ultra HD Blu-ray release, making the most of the format's dynamic range and wider colour capabilities. Demo heaven.



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TOP 10 Projectors

**Sony VPL-VW520ES** → £8,800

★★★★★

The top dog in Sony's domestic SXRD projector range, this couples native 4K optics with HDR compatibility for a state-of-the-art performance. Capable of jaw-dropping imagery and offers plenty of install flexibility. *HCC #254*

**JVC DLA-X7000** → £5,700 ★★★★★

With contrast and brightness improvements over the more affordable DLA-X5000, this is a great bigscreen option, although its SDR performance impresses more than HDR. *HCC #259*

**Sony VPL-HW45ES** → £1,850 ★★★★★

The most affordable model in Sony's home cinema range, the Full HD-resolution 45ES features excellent light management for a routinely cinematic image. Great value. *HCC #263*

**ViewSonic Pro7827HD** → £600 ★★★★★

Pictures impress from this single-chip DLP budget option that carries a third HDMI input designed for smart sticks. Includes ISF calibration and 12V trigger. 3D spec are an optional extra. *HCC #261*

**JVC DLA-X5000** → £4,000 ★★★★★

Fourth-gen eShift projector marries its pixel-shifting talents with a contrasty performance, HDR support and HDMI 2.0a. Not the smoothest with motion, and price tag is considerable. *HCC #257*

**Epson EH-TW9300** → £3,000 ★★★★★

Epson brings HDR playback and 4K up-rezzing to an agreeable price tag. Colourful and well-contrasted visuals, but don't expect an HDR knockout. *HCC #266*

**Optoma GT5000** → £1,000 ★★★★★

Ultra short-throw model with healthy brightness that makes sense for regular living rooms where a traditional install isn't possible. Casts Full HD images from just 30cm. *HCC #261*

**BenQ W2000** → £800 ★★★★★

Average black-level performance limits this model's all-round appeal, but elsewhere this Full HD DLP budget PJ catches the eye with its calibration options and detailed visuals. *HCC #257*

**Optoma HD27** → £800 ★★★★★

Another budget beamer where black levels aren't exemplary, but there's plenty to like here including the small form factor and vibrant colours. Limited zoom of 1.1x. *HCC #264*

**Philips Screeneo 2.0** → £1,500 ★★★★★

Philips retools its ultra short-throw PJ to now offer a Full HD resolution. Enjoyable imagery and easy setup, but some may miss the media player/LED lamp of its predecessor. *HCC #262*

TECH INFO: PROJECTORS



Installation: Although projectors can be temporarily placed on a cupboard, stand or shelf situated at the rear of the room (use the adjustable feet on its base to level the image so that it aligns with the screen), a much better long-term solution is to mount it on your ceiling with an appropriate bracket. Projectors can be quite heavy, though, so it's important to ensure that the bracket is attached firmly – ideally, it should be secured to a joist. Position your PJ so that an imaginary line from its lens to the opposite side of the room hits the screen exactly half-way along its width. The location of your screen should therefore dictate where your projector is. A decent tape-measure or laser pointer will help you to determine the position.

Throw distance: Throw distance specifies the distance between the projector and screen for a focused image of given size. As the vast majority of projectors are equipped with a zoom lens, minimum and maximum throw distances are often specified – say, 3.01m to 6.08m for a 100in. 16:9 image. Shorter throw distances are ideal for smaller rooms, and longer ones for larger rooms. Simple.

Throw ratio: Sometimes, a manufacturer will quote a throw ratio rather than a throw distance. This is basically the throw distance divided by the image width. To get the projected image size, divide the distance between projector and screen by the specified figure. Once again, the inclusion of a zoom lens means that upper and lower figures are usually specified.

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TOP 10 Speakers


- 


1 Monitor Audio Gold 300AV → £7,150 ★★★★★
MA revamps its Gold Series and we pay serious attention. This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. *HCC #251*
- 


2 Q Acoustics 3000 5.1 Cinema Pack → £700 ★★★★★
A superior compact package with driver improvements over the previous 2000i series. The two-way cabinets and dual-driver sub combine to offer impressive audio for the money. *HCC #247*
- 


3 XTZ Cinema Series 5.1.4 → £3,700 ★★★★★
Spectacular dynamics, gut-thumping bass and a sense of scale that most systems at this price only dream of – XTZ's 3D audio-ready setup is an easy recommendation. *HCC #259*
- 


4 KEF R Series 7.1 → £6,500 ★★★★★
A 7.1 array mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this authoritative package takes its cues from KEF's Blade concept speaker and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. *HCC #217*
- 

5 Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV → £1,500 ★★★★★
Like their Gold siblings, these feature switchable surround speakers and MA's C-CAM drivers. Smaller in stature and output, but eminently more affordable. *HCC #254*
- 

6 Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP → £850 ★★★★★
This package offers a lot for less than a grand – two-way surrounds, a potent three-driver centre channel and agile subwoofer. Great movie sound and excellent build. *HCC #248*
- 

7 ELAC Debut 5.1.2 → £1,950 ★★★★★
Well-priced floorstanding Atmos system that manages to balance subtlety and precision with an exciting delivery. Subwoofer includes app-based room EQ. *HCC #262*
- 

8 DALI Opticon 5.1 → £3,200 ★★★★★
The Opticons employ driver designs created for DALI's higher-end models, and showcase a talent for both involving music presentation and high-octane home cinema. *HCC #260*
- 

9 Dynaudio Emit 5.1 → £3,200 ★★★★★
Entry-level for Danish brand Dynaudio – still a hefty chunk for a 5.1 array. What the money gets you is a wonderfully natural and cohesive soundstage and stonking build quality. *HCC #263*
- 

10 Q Acoustics Concept 5.1 Cinema Pack → £1,750 ★★★★★
Step-up Q Acoustics offering with handsome floorstanders joined by standmount surrounds employing the Concept Gelcore construction. Classy, consistently neutral performance. *HCC #257*

TECH INFO: SPEAKERS



Centre speaker: Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible. Of course, if you're using a projector screen, it should ideally be placed behind it.

Front speakers: Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.

Subwoofer: Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

Surrounds: Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds – it is, in fact, where you should locate the sixth and seventh speakers (rears) in a traditional 7.1 array.

DEMO DELIGHT

Deadpool: A bonus treat for buyers of this flick on Ultra HD Blu-ray (as it's not included on the 1080p platter) is Fox's first Dolby Atmos track. The soundmix keeps pace with *Deadpool*'s visceral, kinetic approach, proffering hyperactive effects placement, appreciable soundstage depth and a rich, boisterous LFE channel.

Starscape Fibre Optic Lighting

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Photo courtesy of Gary J. Fernandez Limited

TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors



1 Anthem MRX 1120 → £4,000

★★★★★

Combining Anthem's superb ARC room EQ system with 11-channel amplification makes this an essential consideration for full-spec Atmos setups. Muscular, precise sound. No networking skills, though. *HCC #265*



2 Arcam AVR850 → £4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos (and future DTS:X) support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ. 11-channel pre-outs for full-fat setups. *HCC #257*



3 Marantz AV8802A → £3,350 ★★★★★

This 11.2-channel next-gen processor (Atmos, DTS-X and Auro-3D) is an obvious upgrade for a high-performance separates system. Luxuriant, natural sound quality. *HCC #253*



4 Trinnov Audio Altitude32 → £27,000 ★★★★★

Capable of outputting 32 discrete channels and mapping Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D sources to any setup via advanced EQ. Only premium cinema owners need apply, though. *HCC #262*



5 Denon AVR-X2300W → £500 ★★★★★

This almost entry-level Denon offers excellent value for money, with a well-balanced sound signature and bulging feature set. Seven-channel design won't suit all setups. *HCC #263*



6 Yamaha RX-A3060 → £2,000 ★★★★★

New nine-channel flagship from Yamaha features excellent room EQ implementation, well-judged DSP modes, and an even-handed, effortless sound. *HCC #264*



7 Marantz NR1607 → £600 ★★★★★

The latest slim-line AVR from Marantz continues the brand's good work when it comes to space-saving sonics. Seven-channel amp with object-based audio. Punchy, lively sound. *HCC #266*



8 Pioneer VSX-1131 → £550 ★★★★★

Seven-channel model with Atmos and DTS:X support that features an overhauled remote control and UI to improve usability. Bass-rich, energetic sound. *HCC #265*



9 Cambridge Audio CXR120 → £1,500 ★★★★★

This Brit-designed 7.2-channel receiver focuses on performance and ignores object-based audio and built-in Bluetooth. Sound quality is assured and construction is monstrous. *HCC #251*



10 Onkyo TX-RZ800 → £1,050 ★★★★★

Feature-packed (DTS:X, HDCP 2.2) and sporting a new, clean design, Onkyo's mid-priced nine-channel AVR is easy to use and sounds sprightly, if a little short on aggression. *HCC #253*

TECH INFO: AV RECEIVERS



Tackling new heights: A recent innovation in AVR circles is the introduction of Dolby Atmos, the object-based sound format that has taken off in commercial cinemas and is supported in the home by the likes of Onkyo, Pioneer, Denon, Marantz and Yamaha. This requires new height speakers in addition to a regular 'flat' 5.1 or 7.1 speaker configuration. The heights can either be physically mounted in/on your ceiling, or provided via up-firing reflective models. Setup can be complex, but the results are certainly impressive. Atmos-encoded Blu-rays are a bit thin on the ground, but you can use Dolby Surround post-processing with regular 5.1/7.1 soundtracks to get the most from your new AVR/speakers. Rivals to Atmos are Auro-3D, which uses height speakers in a different configuration, and DTS:X. Most AVR brands have pledged support for the latter; software is beginning to arrive.

How much power?: Many of the mass-market AV receiver manufacturers are involved in a specifications race to see who can say their model is the most powerful, which can be confusing for consumers. For instance, both Krell's £7,000 S-1500 seven-channel power amp and Yamaha's £500 RX-V675 both claim 7 x 150W – the important part is that Krell's figure is into an eight-ohm load with all channels driven, and that Yamaha's is with one channel into a four-ohm load, which is hardly a real-world situation. The best advice is ignore the numbers game and get a demo of your desired AVR with the same, or similar, speakers that you intend to partner it with.

TOP 5 Bonus features



The Trouble with Titian Revisited

Arrow Video's Blu-ray of '60s Roger Corman horror *Blood Bath* includes four different cuts of the movie plus an 81-minute doc helping you make sense of its bizarre production history.

★★★★★



Secrets of the Force Awakens...

This 70-minute *Making of...* feature accompanying the latest *Star Wars* flick is essential viewing for franchise fans, going into detail about director JJ Abrams' production processes.

★★★★★



Tales from the Bowling Alley

Joining 88 Films' BD of *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama* is this monster 137-minute doc comprised of archival on-set footage. It even has its own optional chat track.

★★★★★



The Giant's Dream

Superior hour-long documentary on *The Iron Giant*'s Signature Edition Blu-ray that is refreshingly honest about the toon's production and its now-famous box office failure. Brilliant stuff.

★★★★★



The Long Way Home: Making The Martian

The recent Extended Edition of the Ridley Scott sci-fi offers this excellent 79-minute documentary (directed by Charles de Lauzirika) that charts the movie's production.

★★★★★

TOP 10 Subwoofers

- 

SVS SB-2000 → £600 ★★★★★
This follow up to the SB-1000, which incorporates a new 12in driver and revamped Sledge DSP amplifier, offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbibes your Blu-rays with potent LFE, the SB-2000 sounds quick and taut, and is a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. *HCC #233*
- 

REL 212SE → £2,750 ★★★★★
Lush design joins engineering nous in this premium sub with two active 12in drivers supported by a pair of passive radiators. Loud, deep and impactful, your BDs are in safe hands. *HCC #246*
- 

JL Audio Fathom f212v2 → £6,500 ★★★★★
A second-gen outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (now 3,600W) and improvements to the room EQ system among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. *HCC #261*
- 

REL S/3 SHO → £1,450 ★★★★★
The 10in, 400W S/3 is part of REL's revamped 'Super High Output' Serie S line. Performance is excellent, with speed, control and a scale bigger than you might expect. *HCC #264*
- 

Bowers & Wilkins PVID → £1,200 ★★★★★
One of the coolest-looking subs on the planet, B&W's PVID uses DSP trickery to craft an opulent low-end performance. The touch-sensitive OLED display is pure class. *HCC #212*
- 

BK Electronics P12-300SB-DF → £475 ★★★★★
Bass heads can get outrageous value for money in the shape of BK's overperforming 12in sub. A front-firing model is also offered, and other finishes knock the ticket down to sub-£400. *HCC #247*
- 

ELAC SUB 2070 → £1,300 ★★★★★
A dual-driver, 600W sealed sub with control and onboard EQ system driven by a free Android/iOS app. Meaty, assured performance, with useful tweaks offered. *HCC #261*
- 

JL Audio Dominion d108 → £900 ★★★★★
Compact subwoofer that employs an innovative 8in driver (and a 500W amp) to go bigger and deeper than you might imagine. Compatible with JL Audio's JLink wireless system. *HCC #260*
- 

Eclipse TD520SW → £3,000 ★★★★★
This twin 8in woofer, driven by ICEpower amplification, aims for ultimate speed and tone – and succeeds. Simply put, the TD520SW is worth every penny of its asking price. *HCC #249*
- 

Artison Nano 1 → £800 ★★★★★
Artison's media room-friendly woofer tucks twin 6.5in bass drivers and a 300W amp into its compact frame. Bass extension isn't the deepest, but this is tight, fast and heaps of fun. *HCC #253*

TECH INFO: SPEAKERS



Why use more than one sub?: Using two subwoofers (or perhaps four) should, in theory, bring huge rewards in terms of bass performance. But remember that LFE is a tricky beast to control. Running two subs may simply double problems in your room like room boom and suck-outs, where outgoing and reflected bass sounds cancel each other out. If you have some flexibility in where you place subwoofers, trial and error may well throw up some interesting results. The acoustics wizard Floyd E Toole (his book *Sound Reproduction: The Acoustics and Psychoacoustics of Loudspeakers and Rooms* is fine bedtime reading) suggests one LFE sub to either side of the room may be best for accuracy while placing them in the front corners would be best for overall bass power. Yet there is no hard and fast rule as to what will work best for every room, and you may find that simply using one (large) subwoofer is preferable as it's the easiest to get sounding right.

DEMO DELIGHT

San Andreas: This brilliantly over-the-top SFX-heavy disaster flick magicks up a scenario where both downtown Los Angeles and San Francisco (not to mention the Hoover Dam) are hit by mega earthquakes, and its Atmos mix is subsequently loaded with LFE. Buildings topple and pavements tear apart with real fear-inducing weight, keeping your sub on its toes for much of the 110-minute running time.

TOP 5 Console games



Tom Clancy's The Division
Ubisoft's long-gestating online multiplayer RPG/shooter proves worth the wait, courtesy of its well-realised future New York environment, varied gameplay (including solo missions) and grin-inducing weaponry. ★★★★★



LEGO Star Wars: The Force Awakens
Brilliant arcade puzzler (with some light action) that makes great use of *Force Awakens*' set-pieces and chucks in other levels set further afield in the *Star Wars* universe. ★★★★★



Gears of War 4
A thrilling continuation of the Xbox action stalwart, with an absorbing, well-scripted single-player campaign and wonderfully colourful and vibrant visuals (with HDR on Xbox One S). Give it a spin! ★★★★★



No Man's Sky
Massive, intergalactic exploration that feels like a cross between *Minecraft* and *Elite Dangerous*. Relaxed, absorbing gameplay with a gorgeous 50s/60s sci-fi aesthetic and beautiful orchestral score. Odd but fun. ★★★★★



Uncharted 4: A Thief's End
The final entry in this blockbuster franchise is simply epic, both in terms of gameplay (driving, puzzle-solving, stealth battles...) and the exquisite 1080p visuals. Roll on next year's movie adaptation! ★★★★★

TOP 10 Accessories

- 1 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★**
 KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice for anyone looking to beef up their speaker system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays real dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. Styling and build quality are first rate. £600 gets you a pair – you'll soon want four... *HCC #252*
- 2 Amazon Fire TV 4K → £80 ★★★★★**
 Amazon reboots its media player to include 4K video prowess, greater storage capability and a souped-up engine. The result is an intuitive add-on that's ideal for 4K TV owners. *HCC #254*
- 3 Nvidia Shield Android TV → £150 ★★★★★**
 The Android TV platform gets the hardware it deserves – this stylish set-top box offers potent processing, resulting in a slick gaming and media playback experience. 4K capable. *HCC #262*
- 4 Asus RT-AC87U → £160 ★★★★★**
 A high-spec router can help you get the best from home media streaming – this feature-laden dual-band Asus impresses with speed and range and customisation options. *HCC #259*
- 5 QNAP HS-251 → £300 ★★★★★**
 Adding HDMI connectivity to a NAS device is surprisingly useful – and this slim-line model from QNAP is styled to grace your living room. Flawless media playback and responsive. *HCC #248*
- 6 Logitech Harmony Elite → £270 ★★★★★**
 Flexible and relatively easy to set up, this all-in-one remote package combines touchscreen handset and hub with smart device app. Worthwhile if you have a stacked kit rack. *HCC #256*
- 7 Xbox One S → From £250 ★★★★★**
 The retooled Xbox One adds Ultra HD Blu-ray playback, 4K streaming and HDR gaming to the feature list. Available in 500GB/1TB/2TB versions. Currently no Atmos/DTS:X. *HCC #264*
- 8 PSB Imagine XA → £350 ★★★★★**
 These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*
- 9 DVDO iScan Mini → £275 ★★★★★**
 HDMI 4K upscaler (using Silicon Image's VRS processing) that teases sharpness from HD and SD sources. A good fit for an entry-level or mid-range 4K TV. *HCC #264*
- 10 Devolo dLAN 550 Wi-Fi Starter Kit → £100 ★★★★★**
 Affordable Powerline option bringing stable data transmission (plus Wi-Fi) to an additional zone via mains wiring. Extra plugs sold separately for £60. Not the fastest around. *HCC #260*

TECH INFO: MEDIA PLAYERS



What about my TV?: Most flatscreen TVs from the major brands (Sony, Samsung, Panasonic, LG, Philips, Hisense, etc) also incorporate media player functionality, using Ethernet or Wi-Fi to stream from your home network, or from plugged-in USB drives. Most modern Blu-ray players offer this, too. However, file support is rarely as extensive as on dedicated devices from the likes of Western Digital and A.C. Ryan, and our experience shows some are more adept at playback from USB than over a network. Nor (obviously) is a TV or BD player portable. If your media collection extends beyond JPEGs and MP3s into lossless audio rips and esoteric HD video formats, then a standalone player is a good investment.

Storage: You can, if you really want, store all your files on a plethora of USB drives, or on your PC, but it's best to get a NAS (Network Attached Storage) device for simplified sharing of your media across a network with



multiple players, such as one from Netgear's ReadyNAS range (pictured). These dedicated devices often offer RAID array file backup, and are managed via browser software. Storage capacity can be anything from 1TB to 12TB and beyond.

TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets

**Game of Thrones: The Complete Sixth Season**

Another brilliant BD boxset for HBO's jewel in the crown. Atmos ensures AV thrills, and the story remains strong despite no longer being based on George R. R. Martin's source novels.

★★★★★

**Gomorrah: Complete Seasons 1 & 2**

Thrilling Italian crime drama based on the same book as the 2008 film. This seven-disc set changes the audio from LPCM 2.0 for S1 to DTS-HD 5.1 mixes for the second run.

★★★★★

**Ash vs The Evil Dead: The Complete First Season**

Bruce Campbell returns as Dead-ite slayer Ash in this splatstick series that serves as a perfect accompaniment to the *Evil Dead* movies. Powerful DD 5.1 mixes and fun extras.

★★★★★

**Dissent and Disruption: Alan Clarke at the BBC (1969-1989)**

Mega boxset with a mega price tag (£150) featuring a comprehensive collection of Clarke's work spread across 11 BDs and two DVDs.

★★★★★

**The Walking Dead: The Complete Sixth Season**

More zombie-killing antics from US network AMC, again shot on 16mm film and blessed with stomach-churning surround mixes. Plenty of extras to sink your teeth into, too.

★★★★★

TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



Yamaha YSP-5600SW

→£1,900 ★★★★★

With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely-steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. *HCC #254*



Canton DM55 →£330 ★★★★★

Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doodle to use. Bluetooth built-in. *HCC #260*



Samsung HW-K950 →£1,300 ★★★★★

Soundbar with additional wireless rears and Dolby Atmos support via four upfiring drivers. Impressively largescale performance, good connectivity. No native DTS support. *HCC #263*



Sony HT-XT3 →£450 ★★★★★

A great-sounding soundbase blessed with HDMI connectivity, HDCP 2.2, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, multiroom support, screen mirroring and app control. There's little to complain about. *HCC #250*



Geneva Model Cinema →£550 ★★★★★

The Swiss brand comes up trumps with this five-driver Bluetooth-capable soundbase. It musters a massive sound with huge dynamics, rich bass and articulate highs. *HCC #261*



Q Acoustics Media 4 →£330 ★★★★★

A no-nonsense offering from the speaker specialist, which ignores HDMI inputs and daft DSP modes in favour of creating a nuanced, solid 2.1 soundscape. *HCC #238*



Sony HT-RT5 →£500 ★★★★★

Sony joins the growing 'soundbar with wireless surrounds' market with an enjoyable debut that packs some worthwhile DSP modes and plenty of media-savvy functionality. *HCC #257*



DALI Kubik One →£800 ★★★★★

The Danish speaker brand brings a slice of glamour to your setup with this stylish soundbar. No HDMI or digital decoding but it packs a tight, lively and nuanced sound. *HCC #248*



Acoustic Energy Aego Sound3ar →£200 ★★★★★

Smallscale second-room option impresses with its punch and clarity, but a few EQ tweaks would have been nice. No HDMI connectivity. *HCC #264*



Orbitsound A70 →£500 ★★★★★

Not overly specified – there's no HDMI, for instance – but this elegant 'bar/sub combi just about justifies its price tag with an enveloping and very well-balanced performance. *HCC #251*

TECH INFO: TV PLATFORMS



TV addicts – go free, or pay-to-view?:

The analogue switch-off has created a competitive market in free-to-air platforms, while Sky and Virgin Media are squaring up to the likes of EE TV, Amazon Prime and Netflix. Deciding which service is right for you can be complex, and you may find your needs are best catered for by a combination.

Sky+HD: The long-running satcaster offers a plethora of HD channels, with content including recent movie releases, live sports and sought-after US shows. Hardware options include the 2TB dual-tuner PVR. Premium Sky Q service offers wireless multiroom and 4K content among its tricks.

Virgin Media TiVo: The cable giant offers a three-tuner PVR (1TB) with intelligent TiVo recording tricks, catch-up apps (including Netflix and Spotify), and over 240 channels (depending on package). Premium Sky content can be added on a monthly basis.

Freeview: Common option when it comes to TVs and STBs. Freeview offers 13 HD channels plus SD and radio. Freeview Play adds IPTV integration to the EPG – and you'll find it on Panasonic and Finlux TVs.

Freesat: Satellite service offering a similar – but not identical – channel lineup to Freeview, delivered via a dish but without a subs cost. Budget-priced STBs are available.

YouView: This relatively new kid on the block integrates the UK's main catchup portals directly into a backwards EPG. Again, channels are broadly similar to Freeview and there's no contract. Humax (PVRs) and Sony (TVs) are leading the hardware charge.

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



Paths of Glory

Stanley Kubrick's succinct anti-war drama gets the Masters of Cinema Blu-ray treatment, with exclusive extras and a beautiful, restored monochrome 1080p image that unearths heaps of detail.

★★★★★



Buster Keaton: Short Films 1917-1923

Four-disc BD set collecting 32 shorts (benefitting from new restorations) from the master of silent cinema. This £40 boxset houses some informative extras and a 184-page book!

★★★★★



Killer Dames: Two Gothic Chillers by Emilio Miraglia

Double bill of terrific '70s murder mysteries from the Italian giallo director bundled into a fan-pleasing set with chat tracks, featurettes, trailers, interviews and a 60-page booklet.

★★★★★



Highlander: 30th Anniversary Edition

Everyone's favourite flick about an immortal Scot with a headhunting hobby benefits from a 4K clean up – although grain is still heavy – and a decent bunch of bonus bits.

★★★★★



The Iron Giant: Signature Edition

Another one to cross off the 'Why no Blu-ray release?' list – Brad Bird's excellent animation finally makes its hi-def debut on a faultless platter from Warner available at a bargain price.

★★★★★

Fuel your
passion for
sound and make
your music sing
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from your hi-fi, whether you're
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TOP 5 PVRs



Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it.

★★★★★



Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content.

★★★★★



Humax HDR-1100S, £190

Freesat Freetime PVR that impresses with its usability, VOD options and form factor – Humax's small, white box will slot into any kit rack. We tested the 500GB version – 1TB and 2TB models are also available

★★★★★



Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



EE TV Smart Box £subscription

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★

TOP 5 Headphones



Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



Sony MDR-1ABT, £300

Another cracking Sony pair with a good sonic balance, here with integrated Bluetooth allowing for cable-free movie watching (although they can be used wired too). Large design perhaps not suited to travel

★★★★★



Lindy Cromo NCX-100, £100

A cost-effective domestic option and great for travelling, these noise-cancelling 'phones (which can also be used as a normal passive design) feature a pleasant, balanced sound

★★★★★



PSB M4U1, £220

Aimed at both home and on-the-move use (and supplied with a carry case and two cable options), the M4U1s offer solid bass response and impactful highs. Build quality is good, as is comfort

★★★★★



Bose QC35, £290

The latest in the QuietComfort range ditches the wired connection in favour of Bluetooth but retains Bose's luxurious styling and rich performance. Noise-cancelling mode is very efficient.

★★★★★

TOP 5 Wireless speakers



KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



Q Acoustics BT3, £280

Bluetooth stereo pair with optical input makes a good alternative to a soundbar (there's even a subwoofer pre-out) while remaining a dab hand at music. Neat and tidy design, good price.

★★★★★



Simple Audio Listen, £400

Desktop stereo speakers with Bluetooth support, these benefit from separate tweeter/midbass units and a classy construction. Performance is well-balanced, and a subwoofer output is offered for extra bass

★★★★★



Star Wars Bluetooth speakers, £150 each

Bring a touch of fun to your tunes with these Stormtrooper and C-3PO replica Bluetooth speakers from ACWorldwide. Solid sound quality and gorgeous styling

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

2016 Movie Awards: We round up our favourite Blu-ray and DVD releases of the last year
PlayStation 4 Pro Does 4K/HDR gaming make this console an essential upgrade?
Readers' rooms Inside your home cinemas...

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CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



AV Avenger

As artificial intelligence moves from sci-fi dream to everyday reality, there's another format war coming – and **Steve May** wagers it'll boil down to two belligerents

THE NEXT GREAT format war won't centre on rival physical formats. It won't be fought with incompatible encode/decode technologies either. The battlefield will be the cloud, and the prize will be dominion over life itself – or at least how you live your life.

The combatants will be Amazon, Google, Apple and Microsoft. But who will come out on top? Perhaps controversially I'm going to relegate the latter two to the side-lines. Apple may want to reposition Siri beyond the smartphone space, but I don't think it'll succeed. It can't even reposition Apple TV. Microsoft has Cortina – sorry, Cortana – but similarly I suspect she'll struggle to make sense of any universe beyond Windows 10.

In the world of next-gen smart home technology, it's Amazon landing the early blows. You can read of my love for the Amazon Echo and Alexa elsewhere in this issue [p62], but the recent reveal by search giant Google of a rival control platform, Google Home, shows that there's a massive artificial intelligence brouhaha brewing. And Google has a few secret weapons that could lay Amazon low.

Ostensibly both Echo and Google Home are similar. Like Echo, the Home device is a network- and Bluetooth speaker with voice control and smart functionality. You can quiz the Google Assistant about upcoming events, weather info, traffic updates, etc. Google Home will stream music from the cloud, via supported services like Spotify, Pandora, YouTube Music, Google Play Music and Tunes.

Game-changing with GoogleCast

This new gadget also has access to the planet's biggest information database, but that's not the killer app. Rather, Google Home's big game-changer is GoogleCast, and Amazon doesn't have anything in its armoury to match it.

The impact of GoogleCast reaches way beyond Google's own Chromecast devices. It's now actively being adopted by CE companies for multiroom music streaming. LG and Sony are just two big names which have built GoogleCast support into speakers, soundbars and Blu-ray players.

And there's more to come. Imagine what will happen when big name hi-fi and AV brands also integrate GoogleCast into components. Not only will you be able to natively stream from GoogleCast apps (of which there are over 100), but they'll all fall under Google Home voice command too. It's only a matter of time, then, before Google Home with GoogleCast can be used to voice control video playback. Telling your system what to play, rather than grabbing a remote or tapping an app, is the future. And expect deep integration with the Android TV operating system, currently used by Sony and Philips.

Another move announced at the same time as the Home device was Google Wi-Fi. This brings mesh-network rigidity to the home. This isn't new *per se* – the custom install crowd have been doing it for some time – but is a mainstream solution that should do much of the heavy lifting that tomorrow's Internet of Things (IoT) landscape will require. I'll also bet we'll see native support for Google-owned Nest products, alongside a host of smart home functionality once the API is made available to the development community.

If the next format war is between rival cloud platforms, is our ultimate fate to fall before legions of Terminators run by Skynet? Unlikely. The real movie template to fear is *Demon Seed*, in which a sentient AI known as Proteus IV imprisons and does diabolical things to Julie Christie. Don't say I didn't warn you ■

*Voice control or a regular remote? Which is best?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Steve May is yet to discover an artificial intelligence that can explain how the robbery plan succeeds in *Ocean's Eleven*





musicCast

Wireless Music System



HDCP 2.2 AirPlay Bluetooth Wi-Fi ECO High-Res Audio



Soundbar began with Yamaha

Continuing to innovate and invent to this very day, the world's first object based audio enabled soundbar was a Yamaha. The YSP-5600 offers real surround sound from a single bar at the front of your room and included in Yamaha's MusicCast multi-room system.



MusicCast Controller App



For more info visit yamaha.com/musiccast

oppo

Some things are worth waiting for...



UDP-203
UNIVERSAL UHD PLAYER

COMING SOON

www.oppodigital.co.uk